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STUDIES IN THE SERMON
ON THE MOUNT

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THE SERMON ON
THE MOUNT

BY

REV. THE HON. E. LYTTTELTON, M.A.

"I believe that the root of almost every schism and heresy from which the Christian Church has ever suffered, has been the effort of men to earn, rather than to receive, their salvation."—RUSKIN.

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PREFACE

THE following Studies form an inquiry into such religious and ethical questions as are raised by an attentive consideration of the words of the Sermon on the Mount. I have tried to deal only with those topics which are fairly suggested by the actual precepts recorded in the three chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel.

Lengthy though some of the sections are, the book is but a fragment. Scarcely anything is said about such controversial subjects as the relation between the Matthæan and Lukan reports, or on critical and textual questions, except where they seem to be bound up with the interpretation of the words. The Higher Criticism is valuable and deeply interesting as regards the methods of writing employed by the Evangelists, but it is not probable that it will seriously impugn the authenticity of the sublime words attributed to our Lord ; not at least till many years have passed by. And meantime there are many thoughtful students who wish to get hold of the meaning of the words as they have been handed down. A further reason for the omission is that any reader can ascertain the present position of Higher

Criticism by consulting Dr. Wotaw's learned and most thorough article in the Bible Dictionary (Hastings ; in the Supplementary Volume).

I have also designedly quoted as little as possible from other writers, only now and then in a footnote acknowledging a debt or pointing out what seems to me to be a mistake.

Again, a great deal of interesting matter might have been collected in the way of allusions to modern literature where topics that belong to the Sermon are handled. This task is hardly attempted ; partly from considerations of space and time ; partly because others have done it or might do it far better than I could hope to do it myself.

But the most serious omission is that of other passages in Christ's recorded teaching which touch the same problems as the Sermon touches. The plan generally adopted—not always—in this book is to consider the verses in St. Matthew's chapters *seriatim*, and almost in isolation from other precepts which either limit or expand them. The excuse for this method is that our Lord certainly delivered many of His most striking sayings without the qualifications of them which we now can gather from other texts. If, then, the precepts are isolated there is perhaps no reason why the interpretation should not be so also ; so long as the reader bears in mind that other texts must be compared before any conclusions are taken as fixed. I have not tried to draw conclusions so much as to suggest legitimate lines of thought, starting from what the sayings actually mean.

It hardly needs to be said that such a book as this is not intended to be taken up and read through, but to be consulted by any one who may be studying particular subjects or passages. Perhaps the chapters to which this caution least applies would be the Introduction, the preamble to The Beatitudes, the Corollary on the title Christian ; and the Appendix on the word “ Hypocrite.”

I have to acknowledge my obligations to the Rev. W. O. Burrows for kind suggestions on the Introduction and part of the Beatitudes. The Appendix was read by Dr. Rashdall.

E. LYTELTON.

ETON, 1905.

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STUDIES IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

INTRODUCTION

THE Discourse of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to which has been given the title of the Sermon on the Mount, has evoked, even more remarkably than other portions of His teaching, the admiration of mankind. It is not uncommon to hear people say that it gives them all they require for Christian doctrine. Expressions also are used implying that if men honestly obeyed the precepts of the Sermon in their daily conduct, the bewildering perplexities of modern social life would be smoothed away, and that in their relations with each other both individuals and groups of men would find equilibrium and stable peace. The first opinion is based on the idea that the doctrine of the Sermon is simple and easy; the second assumes that it gives practical directions for the conduct of life.

Under the conviction, however, that these two assumptions are shallow and quite incapable of verification, I have thought it advisable to invite the reader before studying the different passages of the Sermon to consider attentively what is the special quality in it which appeals so powerfully to the heart of man; and the examination of this question will involve an inquiry into its main drift and purpose.

A

Not till this is done, or at least honestly attempted, can we make clear to ourselves how cogent is the claim of the Sermon upon our best attentiveness and power of thought.

First, then, it is evident that we are not given in it any exhaustive code of precepts as to man's different duties in life. This has often been remarked before, but we are apt to forget that this particular omission is certain to cause a peculiar disappointment in any serious-minded reader. Men naturally crave for rules of conduct, since we are all strongly disposed to shift the responsibility and the pain of making moral decisions on to some one else, and a list of tabulated rules, however insufficient and inelastic, would at least offer the advantage of saving some necessity of thinking on complex problems of duty. Indeed, some such feeling as this must have been at the bottom of the Jewish reverence for the Mosaic Law and the rabbinical ordinances built upon it.

But no sooner do we turn to Christ's Sermon to gather from it directions how to behave in regard to various ethical questions than we discover that in this respect it is profoundly unsatisfying. Not only are very many questions wholly unnoticed, but the treatment of those which are touched is so paradoxical and apparently so inapplicable to human life, that we find ourselves, to our dismay, not spared the trouble of thinking but powerfully stimulated to think. To get anything of guidance for conduct out of these verses, we have to notice metaphors and get below the outward form of words, and decide how far the parabolic cast of phraseology may be pressed ; we have to settle why we abandon the literal fulfilment of the precepts, and whether we are to take much account of Oriental forms of speech and of Jewish modes of life prevailing in the first century of our era. And when

we have done all this and more besides, we notice that there are whole tracts of human life on which apparently no ray of light falls from Christ's words. Much more might be said to show that if any one hopes to find in this discourse a *vade mecum* in the problems of life, designed to give him an easy guidance through practical perplexities, he will be woefully disappointed.

But though many sayings in the Sermon are paradoxical and unpractical, yet it may perhaps be supposed that there is a residuum to which this description does not apply, and that the popular estimate of the Sermon is an indication that men try seriously to shape their lives in accordance with the more intelligible of the maxims. But this is not so. If the estimate is to be tested by the relation between the Sermon and practical life, what do we find ? Almost the first principle which a young student lays down for himself in interpreting the precepts is that a literal obedience is not required : therefore we must obey them *in spirit*. Now this is vastly more difficult than the literal obedience, and it is greatly to be feared that the formula is often made the excuse for not considering further what is the real bearing of the injunctions on our lives and practice. Men, by some strange triumph of mental indolence, are able to say that such a command as that about turning the cheek is not to be taken literally, and there leave the subject as if all questions concerning it were for ever laid to rest. They do not perceive that, so far from having solved the difficulty, they have succeeded in stating it in a peculiarly severe and exacting form. They have specified and made clear to themselves the claim of the teaching on their allegiance and submission ; and then, by the whole tenor of their lives, show that its application is a subject outside the horizon of their

thought. It must be admitted that an admiration for the Word of God which yields such a result as this is a miserable travesty of the obedience enjoined by the closing words of chapter vii.

To explain, then, the general admiration for this discourse by saying that it contains exhaustive or simple directions for ordinary life, couched in language of great beauty and power, is most unsatisfactory. The precepts are obviously not exhaustive nor intended to be: and as soon as they are attentively considered they are found to be the reverse of simple. But there is one prevailing characteristic of them which must give some indication of the object of our inquiry. They are all, ultimately, based on a certain view of God's relation to man, namely, that we are the children of a Heavenly Father who cares for us and guides our lives. Thus our lives are in every respect to have a Godward aim.

That this characteristic is less apparent in some sayings than in others is, no doubt, to be admitted. But if we believe that, as Plato used to teach, man is distinguished from animals by always aiming at something, we shall agree that there will be an enormous difference in the character of his aims according as he does or does not clearly conceive of an Almighty God who loves him and helps him. If he has such a clear conception and belief he is at once supplied with a whole series of motives and principles whereby he can live; but speaking roughly on a difficult subject, we may say that if he has not, then he is almost of necessity driven back on another series of motives and principles which, though sometimes connected with the first, are different. They are such as we call worldly. The first may be briefly described as based on filial trust in an unseen Being; the second are dictated by the prevailing desire to

secure what the world offers in and for itself : fame and pleasure, both terms being very widely interpreted. Now, making all allowance for the obvious facts that outwardly there will often be no difference in the conduct we call Godward and that which we call worldly, and again that there are many motives and principles which are rather based on a love of goodness than on the consciousness of a Personal God, it seems probable that if human lives are to be divided at all into two classes, no line of division can be found more appropriate to the facts of the case than that given by the adjectives worldly and Godward, earthly and heavenly, carnal and spiritual. In spite of all the vast tangle of ethical and spiritual principles which we find at work in human lives, the subtle blendings, deceptive shows and false professions, yet we ourselves can discern pretty clearly that each man is looking mainly one way or the other, either to the things of this life or to those of heaven. But it is a patently obvious characteristic of Christ's teaching first to represent this line of division as deep and decisive ; secondly, to assume that lives lived on one side of it, the Godward, are rightly lived, those on the other side, the worldly, are wrongly lived. In other words, the Sermon on the Mount appeals throughout to a high and simple religious instinct as an operative principle in human life. Can we say that in this characteristic we have the key to its unique position among all statements of doctrine which the world has ever heard ?

How far this question may be answered in the affirmative it is partly the object of the following study to ascertain. But the point immediately to be attended to is this : that this peculiar quality of the Sermon, its heavenly-mindedness, its unvarying appeal to man's consciousness of a Father who cares for us,

is so deeply stamped on every phrase and so far determines the treatment of every topic, that the admiration stirred among men by the whole Discourse must be largely and indeed mainly due to this very characteristic. But it is perhaps not quite obvious how very striking a fact this is.

Thoughtful men have taken notice of the lives lived in the Christianised countries, say, of Western Europe, have pondered on the motives which are most vigorously operative, as well as the aspirations which are most frequently avowed, and the effect on their minds is to make them ask if there is any difference whatever between modern Christianity and a civilised heathenism: so much of the life of even the religious world—to say nothing of the pleasure-seekers or the avaricious—is almost entirely pagan. And even if it be thought that such a verdict requires qualification, yet it is impossible to deny that an immense proportion of people give up nearly all their time and energy, and, as far as we can see, their thoughts also to matters mundane—a proportion large enough, one would have thought, to govern quite decisively the drift of public opinion on questions connected with the claims of this world as compared with those of the next. How then comes it about that Christ's great Sermon, which for its understanding requires a fairly strong grasp of unworldly principles, and anyhow a deep interest in those principles for its popularity, is held in reverence which seems to increase as time goes on? It would be very difficult to find a parallel to this phenomenon in any other department of human life. Supposing a political treatise written wholly from a Radical point of view were addressed to a section of society brought up in strait old-fashioned Toryism, whose aims and conduct were admittedly of a Tory type, swayed always by Tory ideas and

Tory interests, what would be the reception accorded to the Radical treatise ? If it were feebly written it would be received with silent contempt. If, on the other hand, it were written with wonderful power and cogency, it would perhaps make some converts, but by the majority of the people to whom it was addressed it would be received with a storm of furious hostility and wrathful invective: the very last and most impossible result would be that an unstinted and unanimous admiration should be accorded to its teaching ; that its phrases should be learnt by heart and taught as a matter of course to children ; but yet that nine-tenths of these same men and women should placidly go on living Tory lives, avowing Tory hopes, and striving pertinaciously for Tory interests, living, in short, on principles manifestly and glaringly opposed to those in which the treatise is steeped from the first sentence to the last. But something like this, is the treatment accorded to the unique and glorious treatise called the Sermon on the Mount.

Thus we have to notice that Christ's appeal to mankind has called forth a double answer. On the one hand, in their conduct men generally ignore the precepts ; on the other hand, they admire the Discourse as a whole. Now of these two answers one is far more difficult to explain than the other. It is easy to find reasons why we should ignore the teaching of such words as "Blessed are the poor," or "Take no thought for the morrow," because we are born with very strong natural tendencies to live a life opposite to that indicated by these words. But the difficulty is to explain why, with these tendencies, we admire. Why is our behaviour so different from that which we should call sensible in the matter of a political pamphlet ?

One tempting explanation would be that the practical application of political principles is that which pro-

vokes controversy, and that in comparison with it whatever moral considerations are involved are of insignificant interest; therefore our Lord's Sermon being wholly moral and spiritual is of a character to be judged calmly, and to be admired according to its merits and apart from disputable details of conduct and practice. But the worst of this theory is that it is flatly contradicted by experience. It is almost a truism to say that the storm of controversy provoked by the Eastern Question in 1877, and by the Home Rule agitation in 1885, was due in each case to the moral principles involved; and further, that any practical proposals from which moral principles are carefully banished are unexciting, unless they savour of spoliation; but if they do they at once involve a moral principle. Similarly, what is called the *odium theologicum* is certainly not due to a forecast of practical changes or impediments to change, but to something provocative of controversy which seems to be inherent in the subject. And yet this is the very subject with which the great Sermon is concerned.

The truth then seems to be that if the contents of the Sermon are divided into practical injunctions, and moral or spiritual precepts, the admiration accorded to it as a whole can hardly be due to the first, since by a large majority of Christians the commands are ignored. And as to the second, the precepts, though dealing with subjects which in other connexions raise a great tumult of dispute, here seem only to rouse a deep and widespread admiration. This characteristic of the Discourse is not only exceedingly interesting but profoundly important, almost overwhelming in its significance. We may assume that if there is something in the general tone of the Discourse which distinguishes it from all other writings, that distinctive quality must at least be one

of the principal reasons why we cannot help reverencing it, turning to it again and again, learning its words, and habitually speaking of it as if it were entirely beyond criticism. And it is fairly obvious that this distinctive quality is the thoroughness with which it appeals to man's instinctive yearning belief in a God who cares how we do fare in this life of ours. Unless there were some such belief deep in man's heart, no such estimate of Christ's Sermon would ever have been formed, as in fact has been formed.

Now it is necessary to observe that the fact has to be stated in some such words as those here used. We are led to recognise an instinctive belief in "a God who cares how we fare"; because while the whole Discourse is penetrated with a feeling for the heavenly life and its supremacy, for God's authority and the majesty of His claims, a very large portion of the teaching, and perhaps the most popular portion, is the enforcing of the doctrine that God does really care for us; that He may be relied on to help, and that a grievous impoverishment of human life is due to the feebleness with which this idea is seized.

But what a stupendous fact this is! Can anything exceed the greatness and the wonder of it, especially when we consider that against this instinctive belief a large number of influences are constantly operating? Two exceedingly powerful and antagonistic forces are in modern life unusually active: the widespread recognition of the power of evil, and the inference hastily drawn from natural science that material causes are a sufficient explanation of the universe, including man's spiritual nature. As to the first, it is well to remember that the simple fact of the increase in means of communication forces on us with greater insistence than ever before the extent of the havoc wrought by sin in the world. A vast number of facts are daily brought

to our cognisance which tell of misuse and wreckage of life, and a large proportion of educated men and women are prone to study manifold forms of corruption, forgetting meantime the beautiful symptoms of spiritual vigour which are to be discerned by those who keep their minds awake. And such a one-sided view of humanity is encouraged by all that is diseased in ephemeral literature, and by idle irresponsible talk, till it becomes quite easy to imagine that evil is supreme in the world, and difficult to be sure that life is in any way ordered by a benevolent God. But there are evidences to show how amazingly deep and enduring the contrary conviction is. The spontaneous homage rendered to the Sermon on the Mount, often by those who profess no feeling for a Personal God, and who apparently are proof against even the winning appeal of the Cross of Christ, is a homage triumphantly extorted from mankind by words which thrill with the recognition of a Father, who cares for and guides His children.

Concerning the second influence, the inference drawn from science as to the sufficiency of material causes, it may well be that students who are in any sense keeping abreast of modern speculation and intelligently watch the so-called conflict between religion and science, are aware that a crude materialism is becoming more and more widely discredited. But still we cannot forget that thirty years ago it was apparently carrying all before it, and that among minds susceptible to prevailing currents of feeling many thousands have been driven to deny the possibility of a divine guidance of human life, so perfect and automatic seemed the working of the great machine of Nature. Is it not then remarkable that many, even among those who are so affected, willingly testify to their ungrudging reverence for

Christ's teaching, especially for that portion of it which tells most distinctly of God's fatherly care for His creatures? There must be something well-nigh imperishable in the strength of man's conviction which responds so cordially to this particular appeal. And the choice that educated people have thus made is in reality the choice between the belief in a God who loves men and makes provision for them, and a vague acknowledgment of a First Cause, conceived of, no matter how unphilosophically, as a Spirit Power which was able to set going the Universe and all its marvels, and then to remain aloof as a mere spectator of its subsequent history. Many attempts have been made to blur the distinction between these two beliefs, as if "for practical purposes" the result of them would be much the same. But while asserting his conviction of the sufficiency of such a "scientific" belief, man betrays his unalterable loyalty to the contrary creed. Of a First Cause which has fashioned the material universe and is not concerned with human needs, the Sermon on the Mount has absolutely nothing to say. It is steeped from beginning to end in a sense of God's fatherly love for, and active intervention on behalf of, His creatures. If this belief by some wonderful process could be withdrawn from the Sermon, is it conceivable that educated people scientifically trained would have been able to admire it as they now undoubtedly do? What would be the character of the Discourse? Let any one attentively ponder on the answer to this question, and it will become apparent to him that our admiration of Christ's teaching is, literally, not in spite of, but because of its deep and simple recognition of an acting benevolent God. For if the theism of the Sermon were of the "scientific" kind, or if it were withdrawn from it altogether, the remains would

be, instead of the glorious teaching which far and wide has taken captive men's hearts and minds, a barren and unrecognisable husk. Thus thousands of people have stoutly asserted their belief in one kind of God, being impelled to it by crude inferences drawn from the study of nature ; but their feeling for our Lord's teaching has belied their words.¹ *

But though the quality here pointed out will be freely granted by some readers, it seems advisable to draw attention to it in its negative aspect. Positively it may be designated as Godwardness ; negatively it is unworldliness. But what is there in that quality which should commend it to man's admiration ? What is unworldliness ? It is to have aims, motives, and ideas which are independent of and often antagonistic to those most urgently suggested by ordinary human life, and are drawn from another sphere. But this "ordinary human life" is what we all live. We are all more or less under the influence of the numberless floating opinions, ideas, and aspirations which sway the minds of mankind, and which we call conventional. In this Sermon Christ calls upon us to break quite loose from this influence, to distrust, nay, despise the standards set up by society at large, and especially if they are recognised by an overwhelming majority of our fellow-men. But this is a most extraordinary claim to make upon a mixed multitude of mankind. What are these standards, these aims, opinions, and estimates ? They are guides to conduct which men through long centuries of social

¹ It may be objected that it is arbitrary to select the Sermon as enforcing our admiration because of its quality of Godwardness, seeing that the Bible from beginning to end is full of it. This last statement I would not dispute. But though it may tend to modify our estimate of the unique greatness of the Sermon, it rather strengthens my argument than not. It reminds us that man yields the same admiration to other writings apparently for the same reason.

life have carefully, even painfully, created ; and it is surely remarkable that we cannot help admiring a Discourse which with unfailing emphasis bids us contradict our own standards, flout our own estimates, trample on our own ideals. We may think we understand why the positive teaching of the Sermon commends itself to us, but this pervading tone of unworldliness almost calls upon us to become scorers of our own selves. Men have agreed upon certain maxims of life, certain notions of how to live. If they were not practically agreed upon them, these notions would not be what we call conventional. Who then is this who bids us turn our backs on all this outcome of human thought and human development ? and what is that in us that makes us reverence and adore Him for so teaching ?

Refraining at present from following this thought further, we can better appreciate the paradoxical character of the facts by tracing the main thread of connexion which runs through the Sermon. Of course, this is an extremely difficult task, and it cannot be hoped that any result arrived at could secure the cordial assent of all readers. Nevertheless, it is certain that any honest attempt in this direction meets with a reward.

The Discourse then opens with the Beatitudes, about which it has often been remarked that in them the Speaker goes clean contrary to maxims and ideas of life and happiness which prevail and always have prevailed among mankind. This indeed requires no proof here. The next paragraph, ver. 13-16, may be roughly paraphrased : "Such being the kind of character required for the Kingdom, it is for you, My hearers, to realise that mankind will be benefited or not according as you show it. But if its principles are so contrary to those ordinarily professed and

acted on, the question arises, What of the laws of conduct which have hitherto been widely observed ? What of our own Jewish Law ?" Christ then explains His attitude (17-20), and goes on to give illustrations, as to murder, adultery, perjury, revenge, and love of our neighbours (20 to end of chap. v.). About all these the important point to notice is, that whereas human laws show a marked tendency to stop short at providing for security of life and property, that is, for certain conditions of a happy existence in this world, Christ's extension of these laws (cf. "fulfil," ver. 17) invariably lands us, so to speak, in a region where this kind of happiness, orderly safety, and stability of this present life is entirely subordinated to the question of obedience to principles which are spiritual and unworldly, and which only in a secondary indirect way can be said to make our present lives happier. Happiness indeed such as we often connect with unselfishness is quite unworldly in character ; that is to say, it is not to be understood or imagined by a man whose whole life is ordered with a view to temporal welfare. No temporal motive can impel any one to begin the practice of unselfishness, because all such motives seem to urge in the opposite direction.

Thus in that part of the Discourse where Christ extends the scope and meaning of the moral law, He broadens it and raises it into a sphere where, properly speaking, worldly considerations have no force or vitality. This remark applies to the whole of chap. v. It is even more patently true of the next great division of the Sermon, chap. vi., which may be divided into two portions : down to ver. 19 Christ teaches that the approval of men is not to be the motive nor is it to determine the manner of our behaviour when we try to do what is right. But it is surely the case that

unless Godwardness were the secret of true well-being and the true "end to which our currents tend," to ignore man's approval, as Christ enjoins, would be sheer folly. What conceivable motive could there be for doing so? The praise of men is perhaps the pleasantest prize to be gained on earth, and no matter how much it is decried by moralists, ignored by philosophers, railed against by satirists, flouted by cynics, it remains the most successful of all channels of appeal which the world makes to the higher order of natures, the only natures which in this connexion it is worth considering.

Thus a very brief summary of the Sermon so far would be as follows: "The character of the members of the new kingdom is to be totally independent of the standards and aims of this world. You, My hearers, are to exhibit the character, and as character depends on the moral law followed, you will bear in mind that the moral law is not in future to be limited by considerations of the temporal welfare of society, as it has generally been in the past; because such an ideal is too external and fails to penetrate deep enough into human life, as it is not purely Godward in its aim. So much for the wrong view of the moral law. Now in the practice of Godwardness you have to overcome two strong counter-influences. First, when the world sees that your actions are dictated by pure and lofty motives, it may be the world will praise you, and you will find its praise sweet; but you must not make it your object. Secondly, you may be unable to concern yourselves with such aims as the securing of men's approval, owing to the pressure of poverty or the prospect of it. This will incline you to be anxious about the necessities of your physical life, but as this is a temporal matter it must not be allowed to be a dominant influence of your conduct and feelings; it

is a symptom of a feeble trust in a Heavenly Father, and could only be justified if this world were our all in all."

We here observe that in insisting on the absolute necessity of unworldliness Christ selects for warning three kinds of appeal which the world makes to characters of different temperament and to people in different circumstances ; and further, He selects only the highest sorts of appeals, neglecting altogether such interruptions to the higher life as are summed up under the word sensuality, probably because they were and for a long time had been generally condemned by men's consciences. So He treats, in a way most characteristic of His teaching, only those claims of the world upon our allegiance which were not then condemned by the public conscience at all, and have not been since, though an approximation to the right point of view has been attained with more or less success by small sections of society at different times. The three kinds of appeal are : (1) to man's reverence for the moral law, which, however, he had grievously circumscribed owing to worldly considerations. This appeal would be to earnest high-minded people anxious to do right ; (2) to the ambitious, who, failing to find satisfaction in God's approval, are naturally inclined to substitute man's ; (3) to the vast horde of commonplace, struggling individuals whose minds are too stunted to be either earnestly set on well-doing, or on ambition, being perpetually hampered by the prospect of increasing difficulty in securing what are thought to be necessities. Thus the three kinds of appeal made by the world to His followers Christ treats of in a descending scale.¹

¹ It would be more natural, one would think, if the scale had ascended, the sense being "you are not to listen to the world's promptings, of course not to your lower nature, but I forbid obedience even to those addressed to the higher part of man's being." This treatment would have been lucid

So far, then, there seems to be good ground for saying that, if to the Sermon on the Mount a special and unique admiration is accorded, this must be principally because it is throughout unworldly in its tone, and is steeped in the conviction that we are the children of a God who cares for us and guides our lives.

When we come to chap. vii. we are met by a still

and justified by precedent. But it may be suggested that the reverse order is due to the strong connexion between the topic of the moral law and the earlier half of chap. v., as shown above. If the subject of anxiety had come first of the three, the arrangement would have been open to objection on the score of abruptness.

It is interesting to note that at first sight, so far from there being an obvious descent in passing from chap. v. to vi., there seems to be a great ascent; in the nature of the subjects handled, and therefore in the kind of characters that are addressed. It would, however, be a mistake to view the passages in this light. True it is that in one sense we pass from the depths to the heights. In chap. v. we are reminded of the humiliating facts of man's nature; his wrestlings with tendencies to foul and squalid crime. But in chap. vi. we are suddenly wafted up to a region in which we see man engaged in his sublimest activities—Prayer, Almsgiving and Fasting, communion with God, acts of mercy to his fellows, the expression of sorrow for sin. And yet it is in reality a descent. There is something noble and genuine in man's struggle against the rebellious flesh and hot tempers of the mind and sins of the tongue. Such conflicts are those in which strong childlike characters are often engaged. They belong to the early simple days of human life, before the beauty of childhood's time has quite passed away. But when He comes to deal with the world's appeal to the ambitious and the morally blind, Christ changes the scene. Man is no longer fighting to save himself from slavery to passion, in a dark and lonely arena wholly devoid of spectatorial pomp and show, but is set on high, the centre of social admiration, the observed of all observers, the model of man's grandest and loftiest activities; and yet, when we look closely, the most terrible type of ruin, because the fact that his aim is selfish while it professes to be Godward blinds him to his own inconsistency, the dishonesty of his motives and the stupidity of his double-mindedness. It appears from a comparison of the two paragraphs that the very obscurity and unheroic character of the struggle against the flesh, the temper, and the tongue give a certain immunity from the worst collapse—that to which the ambitious character is liable. There can hardly be any self-exaltation in the one, but it is nearly inseparable from the other. The contrast is profoundly instructive.

greater difficulty than before in tracing a connexion. Nothing but a firm belief that up to the end of chap. vi. the line of thought is fairly certain will give any hope of solving the problem of chap. vii. At first sight its principal characteristic is fragmentariness, and it is quite possible that there has been compression in the report, and not only that, but that there were pauses and interruptions in the original delivery of the words.

Our Lord has dealt with the grave subject of anxiety about physical necessities, and in so doing was led to mention the fact of evil.¹ He proceeds now to make still clearer the position of His followers as men conscious of sonship to God, but in contact with the world. Already we have learnt that the world can spoil our filial service by offering us the guidance of a moral law tainted with selfishness, or by dazzling us with earthly honours; or again, it can choke and enfeeble our aspirations by commonplace anxieties. But there remains the dread fact of evil. His first injunction as to this is negative. Whatever may be man's right attitude towards evil, there is one thing he is not to do—he is not to judge it, to criticise the scheme of things which admits it, or to busy himself with blundering attempts to improve his neighbour's character; because in presence of life's most bewildering complexities, and well-nigh deafened by its tragic discords, man's chief concern should be to lay hold on the fact of his sonship to Almighty God and tranquilly live the life of a son, letting it tell on the problems with which he is confronted; and the life of a son means the life of a recipient. When once

¹ Previous mention of it, v. 11, 37 (this last is an important parallel to vi. 34), vi. 13; and there are indirect allusions throughout under other terms (v. 12, 22; vi. 23, &c.), or by mention of virtues which are apparently dependent on the existence of evil (v. 4, 6, seq., 13; vi. 3, 14).

this is taken to heart man is powerfully impelled to give; since his true relation to God is simply that of one who so receives that he cannot help giving.¹ The former of these is without limitation—man has only to ask; but the latter is limited in one respect. What he receives as a member of Christ's society is ineffably precious; he longs to pass on the gift, but he must beware of the unfitness of many to receive it. And yet the scope of the duty of giving is immensely wide; no less so than the range of his demands on his fellow-creatures' bounty and love (v. 12).²

Not for the first time in the course of the great Sermon did Christ's words inspire solemn and anxious thoughts in His hearers. Life has now been shown to them as something quickened by a divine principle, but yet alarming in the severity of the demands that it makes. Our Lord recognises this feeling, and confirms it by the vivid parable of the Narrow Way. And if the principle which has been explained is as easy to lose as is a narrow track through a wilderness, man must beware of false guides who offer their services. This is the last of the overtures made by the world to the follower of the Saviour. Fidelity and trust may have enabled him to withstand the deceitfulness of an inadequate code of precepts, or the hollowness of the world's approval, or the carking care of poor equipment; or the dazed bewilderment with which he comes to measure the power of evil. And yet he may fall a victim to the world's offer of guidance; such guidance is frequently false, but it can be tested, if we mark its fruits and are not

¹ It would not be difficult to show how receiving and giving are in fact much the same as that which we sometimes speak of as faith and works.

² The connexion of thought might be much simplified in vv. 7-12 if it were assumed that the subjects of giving and receiving have been dealt with in the Bible text slightly out of order.

gulled by an easy and superficial pietism, which indeed is compatible with a total alienation of heart from the Redeemer of mankind. (To end of vii. 23.)

“Seeing then how tremendous is the issue of life, I will add,” says the Teacher, “one parable to bring out the essential difference between the genuine disciple and the attractive counterfeit; issuing in a ruin due to something wrong in the character of the child of God who proves himself a careless builder.”¹

But an objection might be lodged against the whole line of argument which has here been followed. It might be urged that as the outcome of obedience to Christ’s precepts would be an increase of happiness in this life, man’s tribute of admiration to the discourse only testifies to his instinctive perception of what is expedient, and that there is nothing really unworldly in this feeling after all. It will be remembered also that much is said by so great an authority as Bishop Butler to show that the highest morality conduces to happiness; and, moreover, that

¹ On a review of the connexions of thought which have here been traced, it will perhaps be admitted that they are made out without undue licence of conjecture, except in regard to ver. 6-12. At this point the links in the chain fail us. Either the report of the words is defective, or there has been an unsuccessful fusion of two or more discourses; or Christ delivered His injunctions linked together by a train of thought in His own mind, but not connected by a logical statement, considering that the particular purpose in view (whatever it was) would be thus adequately served.

The principle on which these notes are written is that we are not yet in a position to decide between these three alternatives, even if we some day shall be; but that it would be a great mistake to infer that all attempts to supply the missing connexion are in vain. We shall never know if such and such a connecting thought was really in Christ’s mind when He spoke. But even if not, it may have been in the mind of the compiler, and it would be going too far to say that therefore it has no claim upon our attention. Indeed, even if no such connexion was present even to the compiler’s mind, it still remains an instructive and useful task to set out these wonderful utterances in a logical sequence.

man is perfectly justified in so far being worldly in his aims that, as our ideas of happiness and misery are the nearest and most important to us, "they will, nay, if you please, they ought, to prevail over those of order and beauty and harmony and proportion." A sensible view of the Sermon would in short be, that as there is much sin and misery in the world brought about by obedience to shallow and misleading notions, a remedy for this condition of things can only be stated in terms which contradict those notions ; and man is quite discerning enough to be aware that his true welfare in this life will depend on obedience to such statements.

It is probable that many of those who testify most cordially to their reverence for Christ's teaching would, if pressed, justify it in some such terms as the above. Now, formidable though the objection sounds, it expresses a leading principle of the Sermon quite correctly. But it will be found that, so far from upsetting, it corroborates our argument, or rather it restates the fact on which the argument is mainly based ; and the reason why the same fact is employed in support of apparently opposite opinions is that the principal word, happiness, is used in very different senses.

This will become plain if we imagine what very frequently takes place, a group of men gathered together for the promotion of some undertaking designed for the happiness of human beings. What is the subject of their deliberation ? Briefly, it is the improvement of the supply of earthly or temporal goods to their fellow-creatures ; including necessaries of the physical life, provision for the intellectual life, and, nearly always, a good report among men. But these are exactly the things which Christ tells us are to be considered of no account, or, if they are felt to be

literally necessaries, are to be expected from God's bounty, not secured by man's anxious forethought ; and at once we pass from a perfectly simple, common-sense ideal to one that is exceedingly difficult to explain or even to discuss. Christ may be understood as pointing us forward to a happiness of which we can certainly conceive, and after which we instinctively crave. But it is a happiness which only begins when the other kind—the intelligible kind for which our earthly arrangements are made—is sacrificed and left out of account. Man evidently and undeniably strives for what we call prosperity : it is his nature to do so ; he does not disguise his aims, but professes them far and wide, and nobody blames him. But it cannot be said that the joy and peace foreshadowed by our Lord in such texts as Matt. v. 12 have anything in common with the ideal set before us in the market-place, pictured in our imaginations, preached everywhere, discussed everywhere, postulated in every section of society. And it is because the objection we have stated ignores this fundamental distinction that it seems to tell against the argument based on man's irrepressible yearning after the spiritual, the inexplicable happiness, while he works incessantly for something which is earthly and within the range of common minds. We are still left, therefore, with the inference that the Sermon on the Mount has secured its extraordinary hold on human minds in spite of—or is it because of ?—the fact that it wholly discards all ordinary ideals of happiness.

Nevertheless, there are many readers of the New Testament, men and women of strong philanthropic feelings, who would be much dissatisfied with this statement. To them the precepts of the Sermon are the fundamental principles of social reform. It is a

commonplace saying among them that the awful disorders from which society suffers, such as over-crowding in towns, bad housing, uncertain employment, and other influences which not only destroy temporal happiness but stunt and ruin human life, would rapidly disappear if only people would set themselves to practise the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. And their account of the admiration and reverence generally felt for the Discourse would be simply this: we are groaning and sinking under the weight of hideous evils brought about by human sin and selfishness, and all the time we plainly recognise that in Christ's teaching lies mankind's great hope, proclaiming as it does with unexampled force and beauty the principles of unselfishness, in which alone a cure for human ills is to be found.

This view, closely akin to that already discussed, gives an extremely simple explanation of the question before us. The complicated horrors of civilisation are due to selfishness—man suffers under them; his social fabric is threatened by them. Naturally, then, he turns with respect and veneration to the unique charter of unselfishness, perceiving in it the hope of a social equilibrium here on earth, as well as of bliss hereafter. Surely there is no mystery or difficulty in the matter.

Perhaps there would be none if the facts corresponded to this statement. But in reality the contention that the Sermon gives the principles for social reform and amelioration of man's lot on earth is based on an imaginary view of its contents. To prevent misapprehension I would say at once that there is warrant enough and to spare in our Lord's example, and in those of His precepts which emphasise the duty of love to our neighbour, to make men eager in the brightening of their

brethren's lives. There can be no doubt that the "Enthusiasm of Humanity" is an outcome of Christianity, but it is not therefore true to say that the object of the Sermon was to preach it. It may be admitted that such a text as "Give to him that asketh thee" is capable of a certain not very literal explanation, which, if accepted, would militate against many forms of social injustice and oppression. But nobody could read the passage with any attention without seeing that the drift of its teaching is in quite a different direction. Again, the well-known "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you," &c., may be quoted; and it may be granted that in its literal simple meaning it cuts at the root of social fashions which produce misery. But it is a singularly isolated verse: nothing is given to show whether the application is to be in the relations of individuals, or of classes of society, or of nations. And even if it be given its full weight, and if it be assumed that it was intended to have that specially social application which is desiderated, yet it must in all fairness be admitted that this one verse cannot be decisive for the meaning and purpose of the whole Sermon, especially when we find that all the great connected passages bear with surpassing force, not on the duty of making this world a comfortable place, but on the paramount necessity of our being furnished with principles drawn from elsewhere.

But there is a broad characteristic of the Sermon which is generally overlooked by those who speak of it as teaching the principles of social reform. It is not enough to say that its tone is unworldly, and that it points throughout to a God who cares for us as the Source of our strength and our Guide through the perplexities of life. So far from the precepts being framed to show how society is to be reformed,

there are two assumptions made throughout: first, that a Heavenly Father is sufficient for our needs; secondly, and quite as consistently, that the Christian life is one long antagonism to the influence of the world or of society, and, moreover, that this influence is an abiding fact, no hint being given that we are to expect it to cease. In other words, supposing for a moment these disorders and deep-seated evils in society were completely healed, the whole of the first two chapters and part of the third would at once lose all their meaning. Not only do they not speak of any successful social reform being brought about at any time, but all their teaching is for a society living among unreformed surroundings. Apparently their whole intention and purpose are concerned with a state of things in which sin and unhappiness abide and are strong. Without the conflict which this fact of sin involves, what would be the value of the Beatitudes? Or what the purpose of the sublime warnings against the danger of craving men's praise, if it were not true that that praise is spoilt by error and sinfulness? Or what the sense of the prohibition against anxiety, if there were nothing to be anxious about, if all social relations were in a healthy equilibrium?

In short, it is profoundly unsatisfactory to look for guidance in the task of diminishing social evils, in a discourse which assumes almost throughout that such evils exist and are rampant; and it may well be that we should never have imagined the Sermon to have been directed to their abolition had we not been steeped in certain preconceptions as to its contents. We are suffering under a growing sense of the distresses, the injustices, cruelties, and complications of our social life; we have a profound admiration for the Sermon on the Mount, and so we conclude that

we only have to apply the doctrine of the Sermon to the evils around us and they will disappear. There is no warrant for believing anything of the kind. The purpose of the Sermon is not to teach men how to abolish evil ; but how to behave in its presence ; how to interpret its allurements, to see straight in the midst of its complexities. There is a confidence on which our minds are to be stayed as on an anchor ; not because the tempests are dying down, but because they are still raging. To this confidence Christ urges us. There is a hope which can tranquillise and uplift us, and to this we are to look when we are ready to be cast down ; not because by so doing we shall avoid failure and disappointment, but because we shall surely encounter them. To this hope Christ constrains us. If the influences against which we are striving are in this life and for all men going to lose their power of hindering, of baffling, and of depressing, then the most characteristic teaching of the Saviour of men is of value only for a limited time ; it deals with a period of transition, and hastens on a state of things when it will have no meaning. But if what we call evil is a fact which will endure as far as the human mind can forecast the future of this world, then His precepts are for all time, and will ever be the mainspring of the principles by which our lives are to be ordered and our hope sustained.¹

¹ The above remarks are based on the actual contents of the Sermon ; yet it will be felt that they can hardly be the last word on the difficult subject of the obligations of Christian citizenship. If it were true that Christianity has *nothing* to do with rectifying injustices, oppressions, and disorders in our social system, we should find ourselves in much bewilderment about it. Moreover, it is not to be expected that men should acquiesce in the view that Christ's teaching assumes or even tolerates the continuous existence of social disorders.

The subject is full of interest and importance for an age marked by much philanthropic eagerness, and by many urgent demands on the Church of Christ to be up and doing, to give of her best talent and

In a sense, then, the teaching of the Redeemer of the world is surprisingly limited. He has revealed to us the unspeakable mercy of God, and bids us look forward to a life of union with Him beyond the grave,

motive power to the task of bettering the social environment. Much controversy is stirred by the growth and activity of such a body as the Christian Social Union, and the question is often asked, Ought Christian priests to be giving time and energy to questions of this nature? and how far are they to devote themselves to purely spiritual work? The questions can only be treated in brief outline.

It would not be difficult to make out a formidable case against the claims of citizenship on the time and energies of a Christian. First, there is a remarkable absence of reference to the subject in our Lord's teaching generally. Secondly, there are significant texts which strike a different note, some of which definitely affirm, more distinctly than the Sermon implies, that discord and divisions are not to be looked on as transitory phenomena in the history of mankind. Thirdly, experience seems to show that, in so far as Christianity has increased the temporal happiness of mankind, it has done so by not directly aiming at it; that is to say, instead of directly attacking the outward conditions which seem to make for disorder and suffering, it has laid down certain principles: *e.g.* (1) enforcing the law of love of our neighbours; and (2) showing the meaning of suffering. And the effectiveness of the work of Christianity in increasing happiness has been proportioned to the thoroughness with which it has devoted itself to some higher principle than to any which could be called worldly. Fourthly, temporal happiness is the aim of many who could be described quite truthfully as mere hedonists, *i.e.* men whose readiness to forward schemes for the redress of others' wrongs is really due to a selfish desire for a general contentment because of the security which depends on it. It can hardly be satisfactory to suppose that the aim of the religion founded by the crucified Son of Man is the same as that of an avowed pleasure-seeker who never for one moment lifts his thoughts above this present life, and who openly derides the idea that God has made a special revelation to man, or indeed, that we can conceive at all of a Personal God who provides in any way for human needs. Fifthly, the theory that Christians ought to aim always at increasing temporal happiness is tantamount to saying that faithful obedience to Christ's precepts will be rewarded by an increase of social prosperity. But this is the familiar doctrine of much of the Old Testament (enforced specially in the Book of Deuteronomy), and it has often been pointed out that in the New Testament a different appeal altogether is made to those who desire to do God's will, *viz.*, an appeal based on the satisfying completeness of the motive of simple service to Him.

On the other hand, we have to consider that our Lord taught by

when, as we say, "time shall be no more." Is it not then a most striking fact that in His encouragements and exhortations to man on earth, in those utterances of imperishable beauty and depth, He has hardly dwelt at all on the glory of the eternal prospect, but confined Himself to principles which refer to a state

example as well as by precept, and that His example is that of One who went about doing good and bringing solace to the broken-hearted and health to the sick; in short, increasing the sum of human happiness. This simple consideration will outweigh, in the opinion of many loyal Christians, any number of theoretical inferences from the teaching of the Gospels. Again, if it is conceded that the most effective treatment of human unhappiness is to deal with it indirectly, this is also a concession to the principle contended for; in other words, the dispute would be not whether suffering and disorder should be diminished, but only as to the best method of diminishing them. Again, in the present day it is impossible to resist the doctrine often enforced in an indirect unformulated fashion, that the influence of religion is intended to embrace this present life; not only to teach men that life is a probation, but now and here in the midst of intricate and tangled problems to uplift, to cleanse, to cheer and to restore; and that citizenship is really a religious idea. The conception of England's imperial vocation is not a piece of English hypocrisy. At the bottom of this feeling there is the conviction that citizenship teaches self-denial, being a true form of patriotism; and though it may not be a profession of godliness, it is undoubtedly a seeking after the highest Good. Lastly, no one objects to intercessions being offered for temporal prosperity; why, then, should there be any hesitation in working for it? What prompts our prayers is a healthy spontaneous desire for others' happiness, and it need not have the slightest taint of selfishness in it. The same desire may surely prompt to action.

Thus the difficulty of reconciling opposing or at least different claims has persuaded many Christians, earnestly desirous of walking worthily of the vocation wherewith they are called, to give themselves up to works of charity and beneficence in an unreflecting fashion, as if they despaired of arriving at any true principle of guidance. This method can hardly be the best possible; it is, anyhow, likely to be spoilt by the depressing influence of failure; and if not, the permanence and success of it must depend on some deeper principle which may be unconsciously followed. The large amount of failure which besets charitable effort is almost proverbial, and it is worth while, if only to secure some safeguard against hopelessness, to seek a reconciliation of the claims of this life and the next.

We naturally turn then to our Lord's example, and the main questions which call for an answer are something of this kind: (1) What was the

of temporal warfare? Man's tendency is strangely different. At one time we try to sustain our flagging spirits with brightly drawn pictures of the life of the blessed in heaven. This was the kind of encouragement commonly adopted among religious people a generation or two ago. Nowadays, however, we feed

aim of Christ's work on earth for the last three years of His life? (2) What relation to that aim did the works of healing bear? (3) If this is determined, how far may we assume that the same relation is to be observed by the Church? The answer to (1) will be affected by the view we take of Christ's work after the Ascension. But suppose we look quite simply at the Gospel narrative, we find a record of One who taught men a new conception of their relation to God, viz., that of sonship, as being a completely satisfying basis for conduct, though there were many influences which militated against it. The record tells us how Jesus Himself lived firmly holding to this idea against the most violent onslaughts of malice and hostility. While engaged, then, in giving men this new and living evidence of what an unworldly life on earth could be, He devoted a great deal of time to works of healing, and there are many readers who see in these works something more than deeds of compassion; they appear to be evidences of a plan of teaching, by appeal to the eye, certain deep truths concerning man's moral and spiritual life and the healing power residing in Christ's person. Again, as the time was very short, we should perhaps emphasise the necessity which existed of awakening attention to His claims and stirring men's sluggish minds to a requisite degree of interest. Other students again have felt that our Lord desired to fulfil in His work the prophecies of the Old Testament, and that His works of healing helped to this end. These considerations, if only to a limited degree admitted, would tend to furnish an answer to (3), to the effect that there were special reasons which induced Christ to devote time and energy to works of healing. Do they, then, apply to His followers? To answer this question with a bare negative would betray a very meagre and stunted view of the Christian society. To all who believe in the special endowment of the Church with the Spirit of God, it should not be difficult to apprehend that our aims are exactly the same as those here ascribed to the Founder of the Church. Men need, and probably always will need, to be taught the fact of spiritual life partly through evidences of what we call physical life. And, especially if the Church were able to show works of healing, the public conscience, as it is called, would be roused to listen to her spiritual teaching. If, however, she labours under a sense of inability thus to cope with works of healing, that is not a sufficient reason why all medical work should be relegated to professional doctors, especially that large and growing department of it which deals

ourselves with hopes drawn from the world as we see it; based, that is, on the prospect of far-reaching reformation and improvement of life for all God's creatures in the human and animal kingdom. And we are so constituted that unless we fancy that we discern signs of real permanent improvement in our

with the influence of mind over matter. It is a pity, for instance, that there is no Church office to be read by a priest to a sufferer who is just going to undergo an operation. Probably in this direction lies the hope that the Church of Christ may once more exhibit something of His power to restore men's bodies ravaged by sin and marred by morbid fancies, ignorance, and error.

But there will always be a difference in the tone of mind between a mere philanthropist, as it is called, and a true Christian, in that simple compassion can never be the only nor the principal motive of the latter, but love and reverence for human souls. It is quite possible for philanthropic activity to be stirred by a selfish wish to make the world a pleasanter place to live in; and some people do useful work in this way merely because they hate ugliness. This, of course, indicates a better feeling than that of the wholly selfish worldling, who simply turns away his eyes from life's tragedies and tries (sometimes with success) to get it established as a sign of bad breeding if such things are mentioned in society. All he knows about them is that they ruffle his peace, and he feels a vague resentment towards them, and towards any one who tries to enlist his sympathies with reform. But the real Christian's chief concern in this world must ever be with the state of men's souls; and when his whole being is moved with indignation at disorder and wrong, it is because men are being made to live under conditions which stunt their growth and forbid their higher aspirations from coming into play; and, in general, make it harder for them to be lifted above animalism and despair. Yet it is true that misery by itself, and apart from spiritual considerations, is spoken of as constituting a claim on our sympathy and help. In the great parable, Lazarus is spoken of as going to Abraham's bosom; but none the less the story is a tremendous indictment against those who refuse to concern themselves with the temporal welfare of their fellow-creatures when their sufferings are brought plainly to their notice. It seems, in short, that we may allow simple misery to appeal to our activities, but, wherever possible, these should be dominated and guided by a fervent desire to promote first and foremost the health of the soul. And the common experience, that when this is wisely set forward there always follows an amelioration of the temporal conditions, may be taken as God's way of showing His approval of the works of compassion, even though they may be undertaken principally by those in whom the more spiritual claim seems for a time to waken no response.

surroundings, either continuing or just going to begin, our spirits fail and our efforts to brighten the lives of our fellow-men sink into a lethargic acquiescence with things as they are. But to many people there is just enough evidence of improvement to furnish them with an incentive to life-long effort. At any rate, men fix their thoughts incessantly on the prospect of evil being overcome either now and here or in some blessed far-distant transformation of the conditions of life. Not so the Son of Man. He never invited His hearers to consider results, and it is a singular and noteworthy paradox that this Discourse, the most inspiring exhortation ever delivered, should not contain one hint that Christian efforts will produce any visible effect on the serried hosts of the armies of Satan's kingdom. Elsewhere, it is true, He speaks of beholding Satan as lightning fallen from heaven.¹ But on the very same occasion, when telling His followers of the greatness of the gift wherewith they had been endowed, He utters the unexpected warning, "Howbeit, in this rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven": thus balancing against His prophecy of victory, a warning that we are not to make it a subject for rejoicing. The seventy missionaries had spoken of their success as being due to their Master's name—they had not taken undue credit for it to themselves—but none the less they are warned to turn their thoughts to another aspect of the subject, even though the latter would seem to us, at first sight, to be almost dangerously suggestive of self-congratulation.

Reverting to the Sermon we are thrown back on the question, wherein does its unique stimulus to effort lie? Quite unlike all human encouragements,

¹ Luke x. 18, R.V.

it steers entirely clear of any promise that Christ's followers are to look for evidence of the effect their lives may have on the world. And the answer therefore to the question is once again the fundamental thought of the Sermon, the Fatherhood of God. A pure and spiritual motive is here given to man. If we conceive of ourselves as members of a Divine family, linked to our Father by the deepest and most intimate union of love, it is impossible that we should regard our brethren with any other feeling but true affection, simply because they are joint inheritors with us of the Divine love, and our love of God constrains us to share His feeling for His other children. Such a motive is easy to understand. What is difficult is the absence of all reference to any success whatever, even of the most spiritual kind. And yet herein we may discern a purpose. Granted that the motive of love to our Heavenly Father is all-sufficient to brace our energies, would there have been any gain if Christ had made His appeal to His followers more attractive and more intelligible by promising a missionary success? Far from it. He would have left them at the mercy of the human tendency to be downcast by failure, which we should then be justified in regarding as evidence of wrong methods of work. The fashion of so regarding it, the heedless and shallow judgments we pronounce on each other's best endeavours, are indications of worldliness of mind as well as serious impediments to the progress of Christ's kingdom. They are like misleading beacon-lights to a traveller seeking a road hard to find, who has been furnished from the beginning with a perfectly sufficient clue to the right path. This clue is the fact of sonship to God. Only those who take this fact deep into their minds are able to face the tremendous prospect of missionary failure;

and yet, while able to contemplate it, they are not in any sense lulled into acquiescence, or embittered with cynicism, or bereft of hope, but they are fortified with a far-reaching assurance.

¶ We are now able to measure in some way the wonder of the Sermon on the Mount, and the obligation which is laid upon us to acquaint ourselves with its main doctrines. It has been noticed (by a writer of deep insight) that our Lord separates Himself from other founders of religions by His readiness to forecast a large measure of failure in the attempts His followers would make towards the attainment of the Christian type of character. Similarly the originality, the sense of power and serene superiority to human ideals, which are denoted by the absence of all reference to missionary success, constitute a phenomenon of unique impressiveness. The teaching which is able to rivet the attention of generations of mankind and evoke the allegiance of all nations and kindreds and people, is found to be supremely independent of the ideals which even the highest natures among men are constantly compelled to set before themselves if they are to be cheered and upheld in the dread conflict with the power of the present world. That is not the same as merely saying that it is free from vulgar ideas of flashy success and from all kinds of tawdry attractiveness due to a conformity with prevailing hopes and aspirations. That would be a noteworthy characteristic by itself; but what we are considering is an elevation of tone above the highest utterances of man, prompting us to raise our thoughts to a region pure from the faintest admixture of those selfish elements which even men of loftiest aspiration are unable wholly to dispense with when they gird themselves to their best endeavour. Except by steeping themselves in the Spirit which breathed these words, men

are dependent on the hope of success. But when they find One who moves in a purer air and rests in majestic tranquillity on a set of principles quite heavenly in tone, they worship Him. Human encouragement consists in pointing out symptoms of the failing power of evil; indications that the assaults on Satan's fortresses are not in vain. We collect instances; we proceed by argument; and no amount of depressing experience seems able to strip off from our hearts the hope of some visible temporal achievement. But the Saviour simply reminds us of an invisible fact, our sonship to our Heavenly Father, who cares for and guides our lives. That is the fact which is completely sufficient to give all needful encouragement, to control our waywardness, to clear our vision for the true perspective, and to quicken us with an infinite aspiration, fresh, buoyant, and eternal.

But herein lies a claim upon our best attention of no ordinary kind. In exact proportion as the central thought of the Sermon transcends even the highest of human motives, it is difficult to comprehend. Doubtless, there is a winning simplicity in the images employed and an unapproachable force and directness in the appeal, as well as a complete sanity of judgment and depth of human sympathy. None the less, however, when we try to think its thoughts, we are taken up into an air difficult for ordinary men to breathe, and yet we are called upon, as in mountain-climbing, for efforts which require all the support we can give them. The standards of judgment which we habitually use, the motives, the postulates of daily human life, are treated by the Speaker with a certain tranquil union of sympathy and detachment far more impressive than any fierce antagonism could have been. The most powerful denunciations of life as

we know it, however unanswerable they may be, leave us unmoved. We feel that their power is due to imperfect understanding. And when, on the other hand, the sympathy with human life expresses a complete satisfaction with its ideals and a joyous abandonment to its achievements, once more we find ourselves disappointed. No great satirist is able to nourish us, nor does the peculiar spirit of the Renaissance fill the void in the soul. But the teaching of Jesus on such a subject as anxiety about earthly necessities reveals a nature full of perfect sympathy with, yet of transcendent superiority to, its theme. With a certain easy mastery over all the elements of the question, He measures the comparative value of each, and allots to each human instinct its legitimate range as determined by eternal truth. He has far too complete an understanding of men simply to judge and disapprove. But this very warmth of sympathy makes all the more impressive the majestic supremacy with which He substitutes the permanent for the ephemeral, the heavenly for the mundane; and by contrast impresses on our souls the inadequacy of the one and the glorious hopefulness of the other.

Thus when the Saviour, in tones of indescribable vividness and power, warns us at the close of this Discourse of the peril of neglecting its precepts, He is not urging us to a certain set of outward actions, nor to any definite kind of life, such as the ascetic or the convivial, the monastic or the solitary; but He constrains us to make our utmost efforts to grasp the meaning of the truth that we are children of God, and all that that involves in respect of life's most pressing problems. He indicates the bearing of the truth upon certain questions of conduct, clearly with the intention that we ourselves should make the effort to apply it far and wide, whenever necessary, as the calls and

claims of life become more numerous, more manifest, more complex. No one who has tried to answer this appeal of his Master, in however humble a degree, will be under any delusion as to its difficulty or as to the unexpected richness of the reward. We are called upon to take into our souls a set of principles which are not of this world; which are contradicted by the world's clamour every hour that we live, and yet which receive their corroboration and attest their value by being applied deeply and patiently to all that is truest and most enduring in human life. For then it is found that they are welcomed and recognised even by those who began by deriding them as something strange and useless for man's needs; and in each recognition they gain in clearness, and inspire afresh the hope that by being re-stated and unfolded once more their power may tell over a yet wider area, and new minds be brought within the limitless range of their appeal.

With some such hope, all too daring and presumptuous though it may seem, the following pages have been written.

I

THE BEATITUDES

THE opening of the Sermon on the Mount has become part of the mental and spiritual heritage of the Christian world, and to such an extent is this the case that it is far from easy to face the question—why does the Discourse open in this particular way? We have grown up from early childhood with the sound of these divinely worded utterances in our ears: we are unable to say how far they have helped to form our conception of the meaning of human life, but there is probably in each of us a dim consciousness that if these words had never been spoken our lives would have missed a certain guidance and encouragement for which, as it is, our deepest gratitude is due to Almighty God. Hence to some there might be an element almost of profanation in any inquiry as to why the words were spoken as they were, and a feeling that the Beatitudes are far too wonderful, too inspiring, too nourishing to require analysis.

And yet we cannot be wrong in bringing to bear on such a subject such powers of discernment as God has given us. The principle from which we start is that if we study the Bible just as we would study another book we shall then be in a position to affirm that it is unlike all other books.¹ It may be true that utterances which we for centuries have thought of as

¹ Westcott, *Contemporary Review*, No. 456, p. 791.

divine, baffle analysis in the same sort of way as other great forces, intellectual and moral, are beyond our powers of statement and explanation, such as the influence of a great personality, the power of eloquence, of music, of natural scenery. Still a careful scrutiny of the main drift of these words, what they say and what they leave unsaid, will be found to suggest thoughts not without some degree of illumination for life's deeper problems.¹

It soon becomes evident, however, that the meaning and purpose of the Beatitudes cannot be estimated

¹ There are certain points which may escape notice. The opening benediction in ver. 3 is repeated in ver. 10, and, strictly rendered, would be "inasmuch as of them is the kingdom of heaven," but with the exception of these two all the second clauses, giving the reason why certain classes of men are blessed, are in the future tense. The second beatitude, for instance, expresses an emphasis exactly similar to that of the next five. "Blessed are they that mourn: inasmuch as they are those who shall be comforted." Again, we observe that in the first eight sayings the third person plural is used, but in the last we read, "Blessed are ye"; and not only is the pronoun remarkable, but we have in the tense "are," not "shall be," some indication that the previous assertions of blessedness are to be taken in the present time though the reason is in the future.

Another feature in the sayings is that the benediction is pronounced as a fact, not as a wish—"blessed are," not "may they be blessed." This is consonant to the tone of authority employed by our Lord throughout. And this becomes all the more striking when we remember that the classes chosen to be so characterised are mainly—not entirely—those whom the ordinary opinion of mankind would unanimously select as the least blessed. This, at least, applies directly to the first selection, "the poor in spirit" (St. Luke "the poor"). The second "they that mourn," "the meek," "they that hunger and thirst after righteousness" (as opposed to the contented), and the last two, "they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake" and the hearers "when men shall reproach and persecute," &c. It is as if Christ were surveying the motley ranks of mankind, and saw them to consist of a vast horde predominantly not poor in spirit, nor mourners, nor meek, but striving incessantly to be the exact opposite, under the conviction that the state which they were shunning is not a state of blessedness but misery; and He opens His discourse with a deliberate verdict that this mass of opinion and practice is wrong. The despised minority are the blessed ones.

without reference to the principal line of thought followed by the Sermon as a whole. This, after the explanation in the Introduction, may be taken to be the Fatherhood of God in its relation to man's needs, the range of its influence, its absolute sufficiency as a guiding and sustaining principle of life. Man is viewed throughout as a child of God, and certain typical problems of conduct and feeling are taken to show how this fact ought to affect ordinary people in their passage from the cradle to the grave. This great idea, however, gives one aspect of God—our Lord gives us another, to which He points almost as frequently ; it is the aspect of God as Sovereign.¹

What is the essential meaning of Fatherhood ? Clearly that of the transmission of life. It is easy to fall into a way of thinking that the teaching about God as a Father would apply equally well to Him if He were regarded by us as no more than a guardian or friend. This must be a mistake. The telling emphasis with which our Lord repeats the familiar phrase, especially in chap. vi., forbids us to eviscerate it of its central meaning. If, then, we conceive of God as a giver of Life, spiritual, mental, and physical (if it helps us so to classify different aspects of it) clearly we must conceive of ourselves as recipients of such life. And the more we ponder on the immensity of this idea the more it illuminates the problems of conduct and questions as to states of feeling, and the more too it reveals itself as dominating the whole of what we ordinarily mean by duty. That is to say, if man is simply a recipient, so that literally every single

¹ It is to be noticed that the two ideas are emphasised separately in the following passages : Sovereignty in v. 3, 10, 19, 20, 34, 35 ; vi. 33 ; vii. 31. Fatherhood, v. 9, 16, 45, 48 ; vi. 1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 14, 15, 18, 26, 32; vii. 11, 21. So that if we judge simply by the number of passages, the idea of God's Fatherhood would seem to be the more prominent.

higher aspiration, every holy thought and right desire is due entirely to God's giving, and every hope of progress is grounded on nothing but His wish to give, and on a certain power of receptivity which is ours, it is plain that the whole of life's problem may be expressed quite simply in some such words as these : our whole duty is to do what is in our power to enlarge our capacity for receiving ; and then, as a necessary consequence of our thankfulness of heart, to see how we may best pass on to others the knowledge of this boundless store of gifts which are to be had for the asking.

If, then, the essential idea of Fatherhood is the transmission of life, that of Sovereignty is the exacting of allegiance. Hence we expect to find in the Sermon that the true attitude for man to assume towards God is not only that of thankful, trustful dependence, but of obedience also to law, binding on him as a member of a kingdom and affecting his conduct towards his fellows. Men have differed at different times in their readiness to conceive of themselves as members of a society. In England we are still dominated by individualistic ideas in religion, and are prone to measure the religious life by the simple but sombre claims of routine duty. We shall find that Christ in this Sermon, as elsewhere, blends into a harmonious unity the conceptions of Fatherhood and Sovereignty in His restatement of the moral law, so as to lift the mind of the merely conscientious man to an apprehension of spontaneous unmeasured service of sonship in a community-life : this last idea belonging both to that of family or of kingdom. We are at once introduced to the vitally important question on which St. Paul's mind was for many years eagerly set—the contrast between Judaism and Christianity, the law and the Gospel : works and faith. And look-

ing a little more closely into the structure of the Sermon, we find that though the two conceptions or aspects of life's claim on man are never dissociated, yet the subject of the first chapter is predominantly such a restatement of the prohibitions of the Old Testament as to annihilate the formal routine spirit of obedience by showing the illimitable character of the moral law. Then in vi. and vii. guidance is given to the spirit of sonship which, though eager and kindled with emotion, may be victimized by the most insidious of all enemies to goodness, a selfish desire for admiration.

Thus the two ideas are very rich, and seem to cover human life. And yet if this were all, if we were coming to the Sermon afresh, quite ignorant of its contents but expecting to find in it principles deep enough and wide enough to guide us through the darkest perplexities of life, we should find the teaching grievously insufficient. Sooner or later the question will be urgently pressed, what are we to believe about pain and evil? And all the more are we constrained to ask this when we reflect on it in the light of the fact that God is here revealed to us as a Father and a King. There is something peculiarly insistent in the challenge which is thus given; how is that Fatherhood or that Sovereignty to be conceived of as operative in any real and satisfying sense if along with them we have to take into account the abiding and heart-rending horrors of human life and the incalculable sufferings of the animal world? The claim put forward for the Beatitudes is that in some surpassing manner they bring comfort and light to mankind vexed with problems of unspeakable gravity and depth. What do they say, then, about pain and evil?

A glance at the sentences themselves will show that

these great subjects are not ignored, but are present in every phrase. They condition and determine the wording and the message of each sublime utterance, but the method of handling them which the Speaker adopts is beyond all description original and impressive. This will become clear if we put before ourselves the position in which our Lord was, as a Teacher, and the practical requirements of the situation.

We may assume that He was speaking to an audience far larger than the crowds that were gathered round Him on the hillside in Galilee. If so, He had to take into account the very different way in which the problems of life were viewed by Jews and Gentiles, and among the latter by Greeks and Romans; or, as the centuries rolled on, by Oriental and European peoples. What conceivable form of teaching could possibly satisfy the Jewish mind to begin with, and then all the different types of temperament which the lapse of time would assuredly bring into contact with the message? And the question assumes a peculiar urgency from the fact that no phenomenon of life evokes and discloses such deep differences in human minds as the facts of pain and evil and their bearing on the belief in God. And yet we feel sure that He who said "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away" was perfectly aware of the extent and complexity of the demand that would be made upon Him; that His message would be subjected to the most searching tests by minds of utmost variety, wholly different in respect of training, hereditary associations, outlook and aspiration.

We may pause for a moment before answering the question to remark that, however the Speaker dealt with this demand, He dealt with it successfully and,

as far as we can tell, with supreme ease. The Beatitudes never wholly fail to win their way to men's hearts and minds when they are given a fair chance of being heard and understood ; and yet there is no hint that the Speaker had to weigh His words anxiously, or to select His topics with any peculiar care. From the mysterious abyss of divine wisdom these rich and inexhaustible maxims are drawn, showing a wholly unembarrassed mastery of the full extent of man's needs, a marvellous sympathy with his infirmities, and a belief in his latent heroism, but also a startling independence of the claims upon Him, which were certain to be made by different types of minds in the future. What were these ?

They may be broadly classified into two great divisions—the speculative and the practical, and they would be exemplified by the attitude towards evil taken up by such different peoples as the Oriental and the Teutonic. To minds of a meditative cast the fact that things go deplorably wrong in this world, and on a vast scale, is a tremendous stumbling-block in the way of any joyful recognition of God's Fatherhood or of His sovereignty. There seems to be a profound intellectual and moral contradiction between the facts of life which they see before them and a sense of sonship which they feel within them and cannot wholly ignore. Hence their view of life lacks unity and consistency. Others, impatient of the intellectual contradiction and ill content with any hesitating acquiescence in things as they are, feel impelled to attack the manifold forms of mischief, injustice, wrong-headedness, and decay which they see around them and know to be within them. What the first of these two classes of men—those of speculative or reflective minds—desire is some reconciliation between facts and convictions ; while the other class—

that of the earnest practical reformers—crave for some encouragement in their warfare against “sin, the world, and the devil,” and one would suppose that no teaching which failed to satisfy either of these elemental demands could win wide acceptance among mankind. There is, moreover, a third set of ideas with which Christ was brought into contact, and which could not be left out of account by any teacher at that time in Palestine—those belonging to the Semitic or Jewish mind. It has been pointed out that, while being more practical than speculative, contemporary Judaism was steeped in the slavish spirit of literal obedience to moral precepts, such a spirit as would make it extraordinarily dangerous to preach to them for fear of the effect of Rabbinical training and associations.¹ These were the three principal tendencies in men’s minds with which our Lord was confronted. Speculative minds would demand a teaching about evil which was intellectually satisfying; practical reformers needed encouragement, and the contemporary Judaism was likely to mistake any moral teaching, and mar its message by an over-literal outward observance.

The demand upon our Lord which arose from the third of these three classes was met by the paradoxical form into which the moral precepts were cast. But with regard to the other two, we are astonished to find that He apparently takes no account of either. He did not touch the speculative difficulty as such, nor even allude to any reconciliation of the convictions in men’s hearts and the grim facts of life; nor, on the other hand, did He promise victory to the practical man’s efforts at reform. And yet the Beatitudes, from

¹ R. W. Dale, “Laws of Christ for Common Life,” second edition, p. 219.

beginning to end, are full of the subjects of pain and evil. Whatever, then, Christ's exact method is, it is strikingly original in what it is not, and significant for what it avoids ; for it avoids just those two ways of treating the subject which we should have believed to be indispensable to success.

If, then, the Beatitudes arrest our attention for what they do not say on the subjects of pain and evil, can we plainly state what their message is ? What kind of teaching do they exemplify ?

The answer is that they speak of a certain tone of mind as all-important which is certainly not the philosophic nor the self-confident ; but may better be described as a blending of tranquil submissiveness and invincible hope. Instead of explaining the existence of pain and evil or prophesying their abolition, our Lord simply affirms that *blessedness belongs to those who come directly under their influence* and are subjected to the full severity of their onslaught. True happiness, He says, belongs to the unhappy ; to those who mostly, because of evil operating in others, are deprived of all that for which men in this world naturally crave—wealth, fame, and the like. With regard to some of the affirmations, this is obvious. But it is less easy to take in that from start to finish Christ insists on the blessedness not of explaining evil nor of conquering it, but of its results. For instance, ver. 3 may be paraphrased, “Owing to the evil in man's nature he is powerless to rise in his own strength ; and yet he yearns to do so. Everything depends on his grasping the fact and so spending his life as one utterly dependent. Blessed are they who in feeling and aspiration are petitioners. This is the result of evil within them, that they have a sense of something lost ; of a life which they need, as they have it not in themselves, but in this result lies their blessedness.”

Similarly in ver. 6 there is an affirmation that true happiness consists in a state of mind which is the direct and inevitable outcome of the particular phase of evil which we notice as slowness of progress towards something better. Again, ver. 7 speaks of a state of feeling towards that in others which is either pain or evil, and to that state blessedness belongs. Purity of heart, whether the expression be taken in its broader or narrower sense, plainly means freedom from evil contamination ; and if that freedom is pronounced blessed, it is hardly possible for us to conceive of it as merely the freedom which is due to innocence or ignorance of evil, but that which with full knowledge of evil persists in single devotion to God. In the word "peacemakers" we seem to have promise of something like triumph. The word seems to speak of evil brought to an end, and of a state of things to which we should apply some such term as Messianic, beginning to dawn on the world. But it is very questionable whether we can conceive of peacemaking unless there exists simultaneously a tendency to strife. It is true that more than any other of these great sayings, this one promises something like success to efforts in the cause of goodness ; but suppose the antagonism ceases owing to the completeness of the success, would the blessing remain ?

It may be observed that with reference to this old-world problem men are strongly inclined at the present day to surmise that evil is good in disguise, as they have often felt with regard to pain, and while surmising thus to fight it. But we notice that Christ discourages all speculation on this topic. Throughout His teaching He seems to feel that the importance of present conduct, or rather of present tone of mind, is so overwhelming that there is something unworthy of

a rational being in the attempt to fathom the mystery, or to forecast, however cautiously, its issue. The present is everything.¹

The more, then, our thoughts are turned in this direction the more anxiously we wait for some promise of success in our fight against pain, misery, and wrong, and the greater our surprise that no such promise is given. But the truth is, it is easy to exaggerate the degree to which combativeness should enter into the Christian life.² There are two kinds of

¹ A very interesting parallel is to be found in Job xxviii. *sub fin.* and Dr. Davidson's note. There is something similar in Shakespear's view of life, according to Mazzini. Cf. Dowden's "Shakespear's Mind and Art," p. 329, second edition, 1876, note: "His genius comprehends and sums up the past and the present: it does not initiate the future."

² It is significant that such of the promised blessings as may be thought of as bringing victory with them are attached to virtues which are the least congenial to the restless activity of the modern reforming spirit. "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven," "they shall inherit the earth." Such words breathe a promise of a certain kind of victory. But (1) it is difficult to say how far they imply the overcoming of the resistance of an evil power; and (2) they are attached to the least militant of the virtues enumerated, *i.e.* meekness and poverty of spirit, and again to the endurance of persecution.

As against this view it may be urged that Christ uses the future tense in the statements as to the promised blessings, that is in the second half of each verse, seven times out of nine. But it should be noticed that, as generally is the case with prophecy, even in Scripture, the time is left quite uncertain. We are inclined to imagine a state of things when evil shall be vanquished. But as far as the Beatitudes are concerned, our Lord has not shown us whether the promises point forward to the time of that consummation or only to a future time on this side of the consummation. There is much to be said for the view that they all fall within the period of the present Dispensation, *i.e.* of the conflict between good and evil, and do not speak of the future towards which we naturally yearn, when all antagonism shall have ceased.

Moreover, whatever view we take of this, it is plain that the future is spoken of in the Beatitudes not as depreciating the importance of the present, but rather as enhancing it, throwing light upon its significance, and interpreting the greatness of its claim. The very last thing we are justified in doing is to suppose that our Lord holds out a prospect before us of otiose tranquillity and bliss without development, such as has often

temper with which evil is withheld ; the one active, the other passive. One servant of Christ is strenuous and stirs up forces into active aggression against the foe ; he must be up and doing, planning, combining, rousing. Another employs a wholly different set of weapons. He is militant, but passively rather than actively. We find there is naturally fostered in him a kind of heavenly-mindedness which manifests itself, of course in opposition to evil, but not in strife and effort, as these words are ordinarily understood. There can be no doubt which of these two tempers of mind is the more in harmony with the Beatitudes. We seem to catch from these sentences the same spirit as that in which our Lord affirmed that in comparison with Martha Mary had chosen the better part ; and whatever inferences may be drawn from the remainder of His teaching it cannot be disputed that there is in the Western European or, rather, English ideal of restless crusading against vice, and all kinds of noisy movements against evils as old as mankind, something out of keeping with the tone of the Sermon. And this remark is true, in spite of the fact that the Sermon is constantly spoken of as the great warrant for the contrary. The question does not concern us here ; excepting that the necessity may be pointed out of our thinking carefully how far we are justified in appealing to a Discourse framed in praise of the passive form of goodness, when we wish to fortify our resolution for an active kind of warfare which is probably far more congenial to our temperament. The attitude towards evil which is here en-

been the dream of popular theology. These promises are best understood as forecasting a state of things when much of what is now misinterpreted as unmitigated evil will be seen to be blessing ; and it is most noteworthy how much encouragement is given by the New Testament for this point of view.

joined upon us is that of lights shining in darkness, or salt acting quietly on its surroundings ; but the Beatitudes are emphatically eloquent on the further duty of withstanding evil by gentleness, loving-kindness, and mercy towards men, and by incessant dependence on God. To say that this spirit of gentleness is not in harmony with the Teutonic temperament is not the same as to show that it is foolish or ineffective : but rather that we require to study it all the more carefully.

How sublime, indeed, is the calm mastery shown by the Saviour over the whole conditions of the problem ! Doubtless, He might have secured a more effective temporary allegiance if there had been in His tone something more definitely eloquent of victory, from which the men of action might have gathered hope, or of philosophic explanation on which inquiring wistful minds might have rested. Great and marvellous is the strength which, in presence of such demands as these, can afford to be patient. How difficult it must have been to do this ! Yet it was done, and with this success that, though He avoids all explicit mention of the end, insisting only on the need of a certain spirit now in the present, yet we feel assured that on this great subject He had His reasons for silence, and so we are enabled to trust His depth of insight and inexhaustible sympathy.

Thus we place ourselves at the right point of view for contemplating the purpose of the Beatitudes if we connect the two main topics : It is as if Christ said, "I am going to tell you about God being your Father and your King ; but there is one set of facts which seem at the very outset to forbid you to think of God under either aspect—the facts of suffering and evil prevailing against good. I tell you they are not to be so regarded, but to be welcomed as blessings veiled.

Your instincts are to avoid them in life and to ignore them in thought, but I tell you that this is suicidal. In your willing acceptance of them lies your blessedness." Thus the air is cleared for the statement of the kind of service required from those who know themselves as God's children.

"BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT"

v. 3

In considering the meaning of these words we should first take notice of the critical question raised by the parallel passage in St. Luke being differently worded : "Blessed are ye poor"—a very different class from the poor in spirit. The "poor" refers to what man *has*; "poor in spirit" to what man *is*. And the former apparently states that there is a blessedness simply in affliction. Students have built up theories as to the composition of the Sermon on the fact of the divergence in the opening words. It is, however, not difficult to see that both sayings correspond exactly to that which we perceive to be the main principle of the discourse. Poverty of spirit may be taken to mean the absence of self-congratulation and self-assertion, the unwillingness to advance claims, a lowly idea of what one has to start with ; hence a readiness to feel dependence. Clearly this is a temperament or state of feeling favourable to the development of the spirit of sonship, whereby man realises that it is from God alone that he receives life. No less is the influence of simple poverty favourable to lifting the mind to the conception of utter dependence on God. A command of this world's resources is the natural concomitant of such acquiescence in human lot as

militates against the notion of our being utterly dependent on God. Thus the two forms of expression are equally appropriate to the opening of this discourse, whatever may be the history of the divergence in their wording.¹

Interesting questions are raised by the form of words in which Christ explains His verdicts: "For theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Is this the promise of a reward in the next world? Is it earned as by right, or is it what we should call a natural consequence?

Let it be observed, first, that the tense used, though present in form, is to some extent future in meaning. The statement, "They are those to whom the kingdom naturally belongs, or who are naturally fitted to take possession of it," is a present statement if the said kingdom is an established fact, but a future statement if the kingdom is still only a prospect. Christ's own conception of the kingdom was that it was near at hand (iv. 17), and we may therefore start by saying that the words do not simply mean, "For they have entered into it," but rather something of this kind, "Inasmuch as they are fitted for the kingdom, and to them it naturally belongs." In other words, the statement concerns their present fitness for a privilege shortly going to be conferred on them. When? Now it is clear that no approximate answer can be given to this question unless we first indicate in what sense the expression "kingdom of heaven" is used.

¹ It is difficult not to form a conjecture as to the origin of this divergence. Supposing our Lord first said, "Blessed are ye poor" (Luke vi. 20), and there was shortly afterwards a conversation on the exact meaning of the phrase, He would naturally go on to explain that in poverty *per se* no blessedness lives, but only in so far as poverty provides an environment more favourable to humility than wealth does. Then according as His hearers were struck either with the original saying or the amplification of it, it got to be recorded in two versions.

It would not be possible to do this so as to satisfy all students of Christ's teaching, but it is not difficult to select one broad interpretation which will commend itself to many minds.¹ It is that our Lord conceived of a sphere of grace under the figure of a kingdom; and that because His own relationship to God was filial in quite a unique sense, human beings were invited to a spiritual but vitally close relationship with Him the Son of God and Son of Man, which would mean an imparting of life to them by Him similar to the imparting of life by God the Father to the Son. The consciousness of His relationship to God made it possible for Christ to conceive and establish a new living bond between Himself and mankind; potentially with all mankind, but in fact with a group only, as, normally, the sphere of the fulfilling of His word, a group which was to be formed immediately and go on expanding to the end of time.

As to this fact that as recipients of the Divine revelation men were dealt with in a gradually expanding group, our minds are differently affected. To some men it is a satisfaction to point out that the Almighty is not bound by His own limits; that grace has often been given outside the group, just as from one point of view the Sacraments are essential to salvation, from another not. Some prefer to blur the facts which show how the Divine influence comes actually in contact with human history; others will emphasise them. To us it seems impossible to ignore the Day of Pentecost as a decisive moment, foretold by Christ, the prospect of which modified His teaching. This, then, would be the answer to the question, When? but it is not unlikely that there are minds

¹ See Dr. Orr's article "Kingdom of God" in Hastings' "Bible Dictionary."

which would prefer that the question should not be put.

We may then conceive of Christ as sojourning among mankind and yearning to impart life already received, and feeling within Himself the capacity of an infinite store of that wondrous thing after which all right-minded human beings were blindly feeling. It was that Divine gift which we call spiritual life. Now all life has a marvellous adaptability, and the variety of its manifestations seem to us almost inexhaustible. So we should have expected our Lord to have told men that it was suited to every form of temperament, character, and condition. But at the very outset He surprises us with a limitation. After all, the "unspeakable gift" was to be suited to one class more than all others that might be named, and that class consists of those who know themselves to have nothing.

So far Christ reveals a fundamental truth about mankind. The mass of men set up a false standard of life, elevating self-sufficiency as a quality worthy of high esteem. And how thoroughly justified this opinion would be were it not that we live under a dispensation of grace! It is far from obvious why we decry self-esteem. It would seem that the simplest condition of happiness is to be sure that self is adequately provided by Nature with faculties and goods for the successful conduct of life. And, in support of this, we may refer to the fact that self-disparagement, even if thoroughly genuine, hardly meets with approval. Let it go to such a point that a human being really thinks and speaks of himself as worthless, the conviction soon would grow that he cannot be far wrong in his estimate, and it would be felt that if such a person were to improve, one of the first symptoms would be that, in

a sense, he would begin to think better of himself. This would probably not amount to self-esteem, but it would be what we call self-respect, a necessary ingredient in every high character. But how is this consistent with Christ's words ?

For there is good ground for believing the exact sense of these to be "Blessed those whose tone and temper, feelings and convictions, are those of one who realises that he is poor."¹ Clearly we cannot suppose that Christ attributes blessedness to one who is destitute of good things but thinks he is not. And if this is so, the parallel passage, "Blessed are the poor," must mean the same as our text. Moreover, "poor" must not be taken as simply impercunious. Whatever be the blessing attached to what we ordinarily term poverty will attach to all forms of what we conceive of as insufficiency of equipment—stupidity, ill-health, incapacity for sympathy, unpopularity, want of tact, &c. And though from this point of view the paradox becomes still more startling, yet we are enabled to get nearer to the answer to our question if we take the words in an unrestricted sense. Thirdly, it would be nonsense to attribute blessedness to the poor, unless *in some way* the prospect before them be to become rich. That is to say, either they are to be compensated for the exact loss or disability under which they are now labouring, by receiving the corresponding form of wealth—if in want of money, they are to be made rich ; if physically weak, physically strong, &c.—or they are to receive some other blessing, so precious as to far outweigh the loss ; and, especially if this other blessing is found to depend actually on the fact of the disability, and to be so

¹ Cf. Rom. viii. 15 : "Not the spirit of bondage," i.e. the character of one who thinks he is a bondsman, but that of one who *knows* he is an adopted son.

related to it that the very severity of the disability becomes a measure of the amount of the compensatory blessing. If there be anything in life which can be so described, then the opening words of our Lord's great Sermon are fraught with meaning for us and instinct with truth.

The condition, then, which is thus indicated is that which belongs to the main conception underlying the Sermon—that men are God's children, receivers of life from Him. Whatever form of poverty may be intended, poverty in any shape helps to stir in man a sense of need, a disposition to consider himself as dependent. If the main fact of our existence is simply this, that for the highest of all possible goods, comprehensively denoted by the word life, we can look to God alone; then a condition which predisposes us to the right kind of dissatisfaction with ourselves will also help us to trust more and more to the promises given us concerning the power of right asking. Then, what words could more appropriately picture the true state of the case than "Blessed are those who realise that they are poor," especially when we remember that "poor" means generally lacking all kinds of endowment of good things, and, further, is closely connected with the idea of living by begging.¹

If this exposition of the text be sound, the real puzzle of life consists not in the fact of widespread poverty but in that of widespread affluence; in the fact that so many are sufficiently endowed with "goods" as to believe that they can live by them, and so cease to look for their true life to God their Father. Or

¹ This precise sense of the word forbids us to water down the expression as if it could mean blessed are the poor (*i.e.* humble) in spirit. It is nothing to the purpose to urge the English expression "poor-spirited," which accidentally recalls the text and denotes a wholly different idea.

rather we may put it in this way. Seeing that a feeling of poverty in its widest sense is a necessary symptom of a Godward habit of mind, and that want of natural blessings is a condition obviously favourable to such a feeling; how do we explain the universality of the instinct which prompts us not only to guard ourselves against poverty, but to diminish it as far as we can in the case of others? To deal with this question would carry us too far. But it may be remarked that there is one kind of wealth which man, with all his dulness of perception, hesitates to worship; that which consists simply in abundance of money. There is one apostolical precept which we find easy to obey, "Covet earnestly the best gifts"; but whatever the conduct of our lives may be, we could hardly dare to assert that among these "best gifts" St. Paul included money. Other gifts are often misused, it is true, and easily divert our attention from the Giver to the gift and its possessor. But man can feel at peace with regard to these; they must be given for a good purpose, which he can help in carrying out; but the putting of money to a good purpose is a far more complicated problem, and increasingly so as the amount of it increases. This seems to be because, as compared with the others, it is man's own creation and the fruit of his (often) Godless effort.¹

¹ Since writing the above I have read Zahn's lucid explanation of the Greek expression *πτωχοὶ τῷ πνεύματι*; and while gratified to find that the above explanation is substantially in accord with his, I would draw attention to the following points which serve to define the exact signification of the words. *Πτωχός* differs from *πένης* and *ένδεις* in that it emphasises the notion of *begging* as distinct from that of simply *lacking*. Hence the idea of dependence belongs to the word. Among the wild and erroneous explanations which have been given, all those which make *πνεύματι* the object of the adjective are excluded by the simple grammatical rule that any of the adjectives expressing lacking would require a genitive of the thing lacked, apart from the wholly inappropriate sense

“BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN”

v. 4

We read these familiar words and contemplate human life as we see it, and we find that grief is regarded with something like unanimity as an unmitigated evil ; and that where this view is not held, it is where it is being displaced by a new theory that pain, even physical pain, grief, disappointment, &c., are not fit to be called evils, for they are illusions. They do not really exist ; and if the mind is trained to a right view of things, it ceases to feel sorrow and the body to feel pain. So we wonder if there is any genuine acceptance of this verdict of Christ's that those who feel grief—the mourners—are blessed.

On all sides there is a disposition to emphasise aspects of facts apparently in direct contradiction to these words. Kindly persons, deeply religious perhaps, when they hear of any one in sorrow, not only do their best to alleviate it, but are genuinely glad when they hear that it has passed away ; and no one would dream of blaming them. Moreover, such a spirit seems to be that of our Lord Himself, Who went about “doing good,” in other words, removing the causes of the mourning which He here pro-

which would be given. The dative case here Zahn takes as in the expression *καθαροί τῷ καρδίᾳ*, as a case denoting respect, which in conjunction with adjectives and intransitive or passive participles was one of the datives used in Bible Greek instead of the accusative of respect. The word “poor” “betokens not a condition but a relation,” of course towards God. “In spirit” then would mean the same as in our expression “a haughty spirit” or “a humble spirit” ; but it is tempting to bring in the signification of *πνεῦμα* as the portion of our being which is in communication with God : this idea being auxiliary to the idea of relation involved in *πτωχός*.

nounces to be blessed. And when one of His followers gives his life to the removal of human suffering we canonise him, and no persuasion will ever make us believe that a life so spent, as by the late Lord Shaftesbury, was spent in vain; in other words, in contravention of the will of God. Yet it is not too much to say that though dimly and perhaps with a distorted notion of their meaning, people do hold that these words contain a truth; and it is wonderful that they should have any such belief, seeing that whole torrents of public opinion, conventional conduct, and the sayings of even the best Christians form a strong influence to undermine it. An enormous proportion of men's efforts, inventiveness, foresight, and brain-power are devoted to the avoidance of all occasions of mourning. This must be because we think all such experiences are evil. But, though we try to avoid it, bereavement comes; and then, it is true, mourning follows as a matter of course. But not because we believe it to be in any sense blessed. We wish to show others that we loved the lost one, and to secure from them, if we can, some sympathy in our grief. Both of these are innocent and natural feelings; but one is independent of, the other antagonistic to, the plain meaning of the maxim which our Lord delivered.

It is, in short, evident that there is a great deal in sorrow with which logic and common-sense have little to do. If we have in our minds a vaguely pious feeling that grief, bereavement, loss, destitution, and such things are helpful towards bringing us nearer to God, then it is impossible to justify logically the almost universal practice of shunning them. If, on the other hand, we take a merely worldly view of grief—that it is an unmitigated evil—why do we think it right to in-

dulge it to a certain extent? And, thirdly, if it is for some inexplicable reason right to indulge it, why and on what principle is a limit set? But if these questions show how little influence common-sense has in this matter, our feeling is nevertheless that in transcending common-sense we get nearer the truth; and in no subject perhaps is it so generally admitted that an ordinary rational, logical point of view is hopelessly inadequate to deal with the facts of life. It may well be that here at the very start we get a glimpse of the blessing spoken of in the text.

But we must define a little as to the meaning of the words used. The Greek word for "mourn" is as well translated as is possible. It frequently means mourning for bereavement, and would include grief for almost any kind of loss, but not perhaps for the sense of such affliction as a disease. Yet we need not restrict the application of the saying at all narrowly. If it applies to bereavement, it is probably true also of pain and sickness, and anyhow is no more difficult to explain in one sense than in the other. We next have to ask if there are qualifying words to be supplied, such as "in the right spirit." Is the blessing pronounced on all mourning and grieving, such, for instance, as the unreflecting grief of a child, or only on such grief as is known and felt to be the means of bringing us nearer to God? In our text the words are unqualified, no less so than in St. Luke vi., and our problem is to interpret what is before us, not something else.

We think, then, of grief as penetrating into an ordinary unthinking life, and being borne like any other disagreeable experience, just as a child endures disappointment unthinkingly. Such an incident in life seems to promise little enough. Is there any blessing or beginning of a blessing attached to it? Is a man

who has lost his best friend necessarily better than one who has not ? The answer would be that grief can only bring a blessing if it acts as a kind of preparation for something else. If it leads to nothing, as we say, it is simply unpleasant, and that is all. And we may assent to the ordinary view of this subject so far as to say that things unpleasant simply as such, considered apart from what they may lead to, are evil. But if there is anything in sorrow which naturally and inevitably fits it to be a preparation, we begin to see a meaning in the text, and some kind of explanation of man's illogical attitude towards this ingredient in his life. For let it be observed that this text, like the other Beatitudes, in reserving the future tense for the second clause, points forward. Something is said about the present, which is explained by something else going to happen later. That is almost tantamount to indicating the *preparatory* character of the discipline of grief.

In asking, then, for what is a preparation, we look closely at the second clause, " For they are those who shall be comforted" ; and we see at once that, whatever is meant by "comforted" here, the statement so far is explicit enough, viz. that something called comfort is reserved alone, or at least specially, for those who pass through the experience of grief. We must not be mechanical in our explanation here. Sometimes people think of "comfort" as if it were simply a restoration to the *status quo ante* ; as if spiritually a man were the same after as before a loss, if the loss is made up to him. If this were so the text would be meaningless, in that it emphatically confines the blessing to a certain class, and explains it partly by the promise that "comfort" is coming to that class and no other ; whereas if all that is meant is a restoration or compensation, clearly others who have not suffered

any loss nor required any compensation are just as well off.

At this point we require a concrete instance. The best illustration of our Lord's words is the experience of the Apostles in the matter of the Passion and Death of Christ, and the light it throws on the power of sorrow.

It would be almost a profanation to apply the words, "Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow," to any except the Lord Himself. But if ever men had any sort of title to use these words of themselves, it was the devoted band who witnessed the drama enacted on Calvary, and yet, after a few days, passed through an ineffable experience which allowed them to return to Jerusalem, "praising and blessing God." Whatever else this experience gained for them, it gave them that rich insight into the meaning of life through which they learnt, not by reasoning, but in some more satisfying way, that loss and soul-piercing sorrow are the necessary ingredients of the deepest conceivable joy. Whatever the world had in store for them, it was impossible that they should ever again feel lasting discouragement or despair. The very shocks which would try their stedfastness, the very destitution under which they would have to labour, even the recurrent proofs that success, as ordinarily conceived of, was not to be for them or their work; these and countless other trials they would at once interpret by the light of their past. They would recognise in every sorrow the preliminary to a new blessing. And all subsequent disciples of the Lord have borne testimony to the same truth.

There is a clear and deep distinction between the spiritual gain of one who has suffered without losing his hold upon God and one who has never known sorrow, but has lived on an equitable level of feeling.

Putting aside a few exceptional cases of persons who seem to grow in grace independently of the discipline which to others is quite indispensable, we may say broadly that our growth in knowledge of God consists in a deepening idea both of sorrow and joy, and that there is no joy comparable to that which gradually absorbs sorrow without extinguishing it, and which, as far as we can tell, would not be felt without the sorrow. Normally at least, the smooth untroubled life is ignorant of the incommunicable rapture born of grief—a rapture compared to which nothing that the world can give, not even the sweet influences of natural beauty, nor the magic of art, nor all that gladdens and uplifts us in human intercourse, is worthy to be called joy. So much at any rate we gather from the recorded experiences of those who have a right to speak on this solemn subject.

“FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED”

v. 4

Enough has been said to show the strange insufficiency of the *prima facie* interpretation of this promise, viz., that if we bear our losses here with resignation, we shall be comforted hereafter. Life teaches us that the comfort begins here and now. And this is easier to understand when we remember that the English word “comfort” originally meant “strengthen,” and that the Greek word and the future tense hints at the promise of the Paraclete who was to be “summoned to the side” of the Apostles—so the word seems to tell us—for the manifold purpose of giving consolation in anguish or in bereavement, and spiritual strength for trial. We should enrich our idea of the word Comforter to the fullest possible extent and then apply it to this text. Hence we can

see how among other things the words tell us that the bearing of bereavement and sorrow—not only in what is usually called resignation, a mute uncomplaining, unintelligent acquiescence in the inevitable—but with a serene confidence in the certainty of Christ's word “Blessed,” brings forth a fruit of spiritual power, which takes of course the most varied forms, but is characterised by something after which all noble hearts habitually yearn. And we can see plainly that if we all tried daily to fortify ourselves with the spirit of these words, the world in a very short time would become a wholly different place to live in.

But it may be said that all this, after all, assumes that the words “in the right spirit” are inserted mentally by the reader or interpreter of the text. This is only true so far that, like all other experiences, that of grief may easily be fruitless if he who is visited by it is incapable of learning.

In short, when sorrow comes upon us we may learn, but our chance of learning will depend on our previous convictions on the subject. Before it comes, what view do people take of sorrow? We may select three opinions which in different ways have held some sway over men's minds. There was once preached the doctrine that grief and pain and the like are indeed facts not to be denied, but that they are such ignoble elements in human life that true virtue consists in steeling the heart against them, and crushing all emotion which they tend to stir. This is Stoicism. The second is the very modern conglomerate of opinions which go by the name of Christian Science. In opposition to the Stoics the votaries of this doctrine maintain that pain and suffering are not facts but hallucinations, and that if the mind is steadily set in the right direction and braced by right principle,

nothing in the shape of calamity or affliction can for a moment disturb the spirit's serene tranquillity. "Be convinced that grief is a delusion, and you will cease to grieve."

It should be noticed that these two doctrines, though differing considerably, agree in a low estimate of all deep feeling of sorrow, the one because it is based on a delusion, the other because it is unworthy of a "wise man." Our Lord's emphatic pronouncement leaves no doubt that He attaches a blessing to those who *feel*. The feeling heart has long been recognised as capable of deeper joys and deeper sorrows than those to whom a severe calm is the ideal. Men might discuss *ad infinitum* as to which of the two yields the happier life, and, if this world were all, it would be reasonable to expect opinions to be permanently divided. But no believer in Christ can be in doubt.

The third of the opinions alluded to is the modern conventional doctrine that pain and grief are evils, and that no amount of trouble spent in eliminating them from human life is wasted, though when thrust upon us it is right and proper to give way to them to a certain extent. It is perhaps no indictment against this view to show that it is inconsistent with itself and illogical, since in a subject so wrapped in mystery one feels that the logical clearness of any theory would be a distinct sign of its inadequacy and falseness. But the serious symptom of error consists in the practical corollary. Granting the truth of Christ's words, in whatever sense that truth may be discerned, it should be admitted on all sides that no line of conduct is so certain to be fatal as the deliberate systematic minimising of these stern elements in life. It is, of course, exceedingly difficult to formulate any principles of action which would simplify the numberless practical

questions belonging to this subject. But much would be gained if men would steadily contemplate the facts of life as proving the truth of these words—first, the impoverishment, the weakening, the decay of vitality, the narrowing of sympathies which mark the lives of those who in practice treat sorrow and suffering as evils to be avoided at any cost ; and conversely, the mysterious power and happiness not unfrequently to be discerned as the outcome of grief and hardness borne “mixed with faith,” when the Spirit of Christ has begun to reveal His working, and by degrees the insane strivings after an untroubled existence lose their force, being subordinated more and more to a very different aspiration—that of doing service to God.

We cannot help asking meantime if our idea of the sorrow spoken of in this text should include sorrow for sin ? Certainly, if a distinction is drawn between remorse for our own sin and grief for the sins of mankind in general. Sorrow for our own *loss*, whatever be the cause of the loss, is legitimate enough, but is a lower feeling than sorrow for others' loss. And probably this definition of sorrow indicates not inadequately the kind of sorrow we ought to feel about sin. It is a grief springing from a clear sense of a feeble hold on the life of God ; and when that sense is a reality, we must grieve. And again, when we distinctly see that others are suffering from this same feebleness of relation to God, we cannot help feeling sorrow on their behalf for their deprivation (coupled of course with burning indignation if God's honour remains unvindicated) rather than any disgust or dislike even though they may have fallen into hideous wickedness. This kind of grief, without aloofness, for others' sinfulness is a very beautiful grace of the Christian character, and Christ's benediction on

sorrow surely covers it. And as it is not difficult for us to perceive the blessedness of sorrowing for our own sinfulness, and the inexpressible certain hope of recovery which it brings, so we may feel confidence that a profound and tender sorrow for the sins of others is a necessary ingredient in the process of the great recovery ; for, however clearly we may see that sin is a necessity of development, it remains none the less loathsome and evil in itself, and there is no limit set by modern enlightenment to the depth of grief we may and ought to feel for the fact of sin in the world. If we are desirous of securing the blessing promised by Christ to sorrow, we must be sure that our sorrow is not watered away by doubts as to what we are sorrowing about, since the only genuine grief is that which cannot be touched by appeals to the reason.

This inquiry has revealed something of the depth of the paradox. The best way of appreciating it is to consider our Lord's own attitude towards sin ; for while He was upborne by the steady consciousness of triumph over evil, and a certainty that God was ordering all for the best, there is nothing in this knowledge that for a moment weakens the unspeakable potency of that sorrow for sin on which—marvellous indeed is the thought—rests the whole hope of all mankind.

“BLESSED ARE THE MEEK: FOR THEY SHALL
INHERIT THE EARTH”

v. 5

If this text means anything like what it seems to mean, viz. that to the gentle the victory in this world is promised, then it is hardly possible to exaggerate the unanimity with which, apparently, it is contra-

dicted in the ordinary practice of mankind. There is, perhaps, no object on which men expend more immense labour and thought than on the provision of enough physical strength to enable them to enforce their will on others. We reflect on the absolute devotion of life which is implied in the existence of modern standing armies ; the marvellous triumphs of human intellect absorbed in the elaboration of a machine for massacring human beings ; the burning self-reproach which prevailed throughout England at the discovery that before the Boer war we were ill equipped with engines of destruction ; and we ask the question, Have we any rag of belief left in the maxim of the Gospel, "Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth," when our actions unceasingly exhibit a conviction that brute force is a necessity of life ?

We notice, however, the singular fact that these modern features of international relations are unlike those which exist in the relations between individuals. It is necessary, therefore, to inquire into the principle underlying our Lord's words, and to ascertain if it is more binding on men, taken as single units individually, than on such masses as we call nations ; and if so, why ? And before we can discern the principle embodied in the text, it will be advisable to indicate answers to the two obvious difficulties : the meaning of the word "meek," and the scope of the promise about inheriting the earth.

The Greek word for "meek," often used to mean "soft" in a concrete sense, and applied to character, expresses broadly the opposite of what we call self-assertive. Probably "gentle" gives us a more exact set of associations than "meek," the former word being free from the slightly disparaging sense of the latter, but it must be taken as applying to character

and not only manner. There is, for instance, a kind of gentleness of manner which accompanies the most pronounced and continuous self-assertion. But gentleness of character would mean the consideration for others' claims and interests which forbids a pushing or insistence of the claims of self ; and if that insistence is backed up by violence, either of speech or action, it becomes more definitely the opposite of gentleness, which is too much engaged with the requirements of others to care about self and its claims, and which we find exhibited in perfection by our Lord during the stormy scenes of the Passion. When brutally struck on the face by a servant of the High Priest, His words were perfectly designed to appeal to the elementary instinct of justice in the man's mind, and so to lead him to higher things. "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil : but if well, why smitest thou me ?" Here we observe that the love for the criminal dictates the appeal, and also the *manner* of the appeal. His better instincts had to be evoked, and as a gentle manner and speech is more likely to succeed than a rough upbraiding manner, there is no trace of roughness or bitterness in the tone. Thus real gentleness indicates such habitual consideration for others as forbids any assertion of the feelings or claims of self ; and at once we recognise that herein lies a mysterious strength which would be lost if the element of gentleness were absent. Sooner or later we all come to believe the French writer's aphorism, *La douceur est une force*, though the strength of our belief is very often insufficient to influence our conduct.

There is unquestionably much that is obscure in this fact. It is difficult to explain why egoism is in reality a cause of weakness ; that is to say, as soon as an individual's own self is felt to be the main object

of his attention he ceases to influence us, and after a time even to interest us. It might have been supposed that if a man's self was to him supremely absorbing, the interest of others in that self would be excited ; but in fact it is just the contrary—the more self-centred he is the less hold he has on others, and the more they disregard the "self" which to him is everything. Conversely, when any one is found literally never to think about himself he at once becomes supremely interesting to others ; and if his own claims are never pressed, but he is known to be swayed solely by consideration for others, at once a power goes forth from him, and that which no amount of self-assertion would win for him is easily conceded. Others give in proportion as he refrains from grasping. Some explanation of this singular phenomenon may be found in the fact that very often real forbearance or the refraining from self-assertion is a sign of self-mastery ; and it is a truism to say that, generally speaking, one who wishes to control others must have first learned to govern himself. In art the same principle is to be discerned. Everywhere self-suppression is a power ; and though a singer to be effective must express emotion, it is all-important that the audience should feel that he has himself in hand, and is never mastered by the emotions he expresses. If he is unmoved they may suspect that he feels nothing, and then they are not touched ; but if he obviously feels a great deal but never allows his feeling to mar his expression, they are powerfully affected by a sense of strength and warmth of feeling combined. In the quality of gentleness there is often the same impression given of imperious selfish claims being successfully curbed by the supremacy of will or the power of love.

Thus in some departments of life, at any rate, we

begin to understand the words "blessed are the meek." It remains to inquire into the phrase "they shall inherit the earth." The alternatives before us are these: we may assume that the Psalmist, whom Christ quotes, meant simply that the meek-spirited were going to win a mundane triumph and be found ultimately to be stronger *in this world* than the self-assertive. But even then it remains uncertain whether Christ quoted the words in that sense, or as meaning quite vaguely that the victory some day will be with the meek, nothing being said to show if the reference is not primarily to the next world. Clearly the fact of quotation makes it impossible to expect certainty in this matter, but we may perhaps be guided by our Lord's habit of appealing in His public discourses to the understanding and feelings of ordinary unenlightened minds. This would point to the words being used in a popular sense not demanding any special knowledge of the Psalmist's writing or of past history. But granting this, we have to remember that the popular sense of a well-known saying changes imperceptibly perhaps from one century to another, till at last it is very far removed from the idea in the writer's mind. We may, however, assume that the fact of a poetical quotation being employed absolves us from the necessity of being extremely precise in fixing the meaning.

We will paraphrase the verse then as follows: "Blessed are the gentle, for to them the victory will ultimately be given"; while for those who would prefer a more literal interpretation, the idea of a victory in this world may be emphasised.

Some such sense as this being admitted, the difficult question remains, how it comes about that in international relations the principle of a power being inherent in the absence of self-assertion is apparently

ignored, when in individual relations few fail to perceive its truth ?

It will be felt at once that this question concerning men in masses is far more complex than any that refers to them singly. It is obviously true that in war far nobler qualities are exhibited and on a far more impressive scale than in conflicts between individuals. Often indeed patriotic self-sacrifice, as far as the individual is concerned, springs from, and is an example of, that freedom from self-assertion which our Lord blesses. And it may be urged that at no time was the moral tone of Europe lower than during the long reaches of the Pax Romana during the later years of the Empire. Nevertheless, it would be a colossal mistake to attribute to these facts any considerable share in deciding men's attitude towards the question of war. In so far as war is upheld as an institution it is because it is held to be indispensable; and when the crowning moment of decision arrives the determining factor is not the glamour thrown around war by countless deeds of heroism in the past, but simply the instinct of national self-assertion.¹ The horrors and havoc occasioned by war must have often decided a Government on the side of peace; but the lustre shed around it by poets and annalists of all ages have an influence in the other direction so small as to be inappreciable.

A common defence of war is the assertion, that when an injustice is threatened by one nation against another there is no possible tribunal to appeal to except force. But there is grave reason to doubt the cogency of this plea. In certain cases, such as in the rebellions of the subject nations of the Turkish Empire, it holds good. Foul wrongs are wrought, and generally there is nothing to be gained by appealing to outside interference. But in ordinary

¹ Plato: *Gorgias*.

cases of modern wars there is no question of injustice, but rather there is a commonplace aggression on one side and retaliation on the other. And the important point for the present discussion is that when this is believed to be the case, or, anyhow, affirmed, there is no such expression of disapproval as generally follows an instance of individual aggression. The influence of the Sermon on the Mount can be clearly traced in one department of life; while in the other, as to the common opinion of the right and wrong of making war, it hardly exists. Nor is it at all easy to see why progress in one case is so much slower than in the other.

Some light may be shed on the question by a consideration of the stages intermediate between individual men and nations. There are the family and the tribe; and we may perhaps add a third—such a community as the *πόλις* or State in ancient Greece. It is noticeable that self-assertion, always prone to take an aggressive form, is felt to be less admirable the smaller the society is which asserts itself. The bitter and destructive feuds between the little Greek states are frequently the theme of indictments launched against the Greek nation as a whole; and this is not because it was a case of Greek meeting Greek, but simply because the societies were small. Englishmen do not hold that the fact of kinship forbids them to admire the action of the American States in severing their connexion with the mother-country, regrettable though the fact may be in its political results. It was plainly an act of self-assertion, and, being on a large scale, is entitled to a meed of approval, which, if the community had been much smaller, would have been withheld. Similarly the Jews have been arraigned by a brilliant writer¹ for their constant tendency to push their claims

¹ Professor Goldwin Smith.

against those of the Gentiles, being all the time not really a nation but a tribe. The sting of the accusation lies in the word "tribal." And it would be admitted, I suppose, that the antagonism roused in us by the self-assertion of a tribe would be intensified if, instead of a tribe, we were dealing with a family. The tone adopted against the Claudii in ancient Rome, or the Medici in mediæval Italy, and many others, is not like the mixed fear and admiration with which the self-aggrandisement of a nation is regarded. There are people found, no doubt, to object to the latter as being simply selfishness on a large scale ; but this requires far more moral insight and conviction than to feel the wrongness and folly when smaller groups of men try to do the same, and still more plainly is the evil discerned in the case of an individual.

In so far, then, as the size of the mass of men whom we imagine as self-assertive is felt to be some excuse for their self-assertion, it probably is for these reasons : (1) A nation is less united than a tribe or family ; (2) Such union as exists is of a less personal character —that is to say, the kinship and community of language, religion, &c., which hold a nation together is far more diluted.

Hence two results : (a) The larger the unit which asserts its own claims, the less of personal self-seeking and self-assertion is involved in the action of its individual members ; (b) And the greater the self-suppression in the efforts made by individuals, which efforts are probably more severe also. In short, the principle of the text is in reality recognised, though in a confused and tentative way, by men's attitude towards international conflicts. As compared with the quarrels of smaller groups, big wars stir more intense effort, and certainly give scope for a far ampler display of heroism ; but this is less to the purpose than

the fact that they are less tainted with the poison of individual personal self-exaltation and ambition. They are free from the odiousness of a single personality, being thrust forward in the face of the conflicting claims of other personalities. Thus war is a form of collective self-assertion, which contains within itself many elements of individual self-suppression, and in this double character it appeals to the higher and lower instincts of men at the same time, securing for itself an immense amount of support thereby. No one could distinguish clearly the various currents of feeling and motive which impel a nation towards a particular war. To judge by men's utterances, the most unabashed spirit of self-aggrandisement is in many quarters rampant, but the feebleness of the opposition offered to this spirit is due probably to the recognition of the directness with which war invokes our belief in the great principle that progress in this world is won through antagonisms and conflicts of one kind or another, and that victory belongs to the side which thinks least of self. We find it impossible to condemn altogether a mighty effort of collective self-assertion, because it depends for its very success on the completeness of individual self-sacrifice.

Meantime we mark the symptoms of the higher principle gaining ground over the lower, a most impressive witness to the power of the Sermon on the Mount. Once, and not long ago, the English people in their strivings for self-assertion were content to fling their young men into the jaws of death, utterly heedless of what happened to the wounded, and in the Peninsular and Crimean Wars, for instance, careless of their terrible privations. They thought of little but the sheer conflict. Nowadays self-assertion is tempered by the humanitarian spirit which imperils

the success of our national self-assertion by weakening the injury we inflict on our adversaries. Every provision made for the tending of the enemy's wounded is so much more homage paid to the maxim, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

"THEY THAT HUNGER AND THIRST"

v. 6

At first hearing this is felt to be a great consolatory saying; it seems to be a benediction on those who wish to be good, irrespective of their being successful. It is to be noted, however, that if we divide human life into two main departments, thought and action, these words exalt the former and ignore the latter; and yet to a great majority of those who live in Western Europe action is far more congenial than thought. And this is true even if we take "thought," in a very broad sense indeed, to include what the text speaks of—a state of feeling. Most people would prefer to be judged by their actions rather than by their feelings. So the text is not a pronouncement in favour of that which comes easiest to ordinary men.

And this view of it is confirmed if we reflect on the New Testament teaching about righteousness. There is nothing more startling in Christ's teaching than the stress which He lays on warnings against counterfeit goodness compared to those against distinct undeniable transgression of the moral law. And we have gathered gradually from these warnings the existence of two chief counterfeits of goodness or righteousness, one of which is inveighed against in this very Sermon with great emphasis; the other with less. One is a coarse caricature of goodness, and consists in the pursuit of a certain line of conduct for the sake of the applause

of men. But, coarse enough though the caricature is, this motive of recognition or approval is so common that, like other travesties of the principle of the Beatitudes, it is universally assumed in ordinary life to be the dominant motive till at last some proof is forthcoming that it is no such thing ; and then indignation gives place to wonder, and wonder to praise. The other is a far more subtle caricature. It is the devotion of time and trouble to communion with God and to the observance of His ordinances in the hope of gaining tranquillity of spirit, as we think we have seen others do before us. It may easily be the case that a young man in his time of youth tries to catch the prize by attempting the first of these two, and then as life goes on and failure dogs his footsteps, he may hope to still the fretful disappointments of his heart by appealing to God. The first is a form of securing gratification for self from men, the second from God ; and if we feel that in the first there is an outrage done to the name of goodness, in the second we ought to feel there is a direct profanation as well. We shall come across many warnings against vulgar ambition, but it seems at first as if our Lord mostly passed over the selfishness of a certain kind of appeal to the Divine Being. The warnings are far more scattered, it is true ; but they are compressed into the framework of the Lord's Prayer ; they are enforced in the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard—a warning against the spirit of bargaining ; but perhaps more distinctly than in any other way our Lord teaches this lesson by the appeal which has ever found a way straight to the heart of humanity—the appeal to the example of a little child.

This most suggestive illustration helps us in regard to the subtle temptation of trying to love God for the sake of a spiritual return. A child at his

best has no thought of self-gratification in doing what his parents wish. He finds a joy, of course, in conformity with his father's will, just as he feels a gladness in the sunlight without knowing why. We feel that the health of the child-like nature shows itself in its unconscious gladness in the best things of life, the beauty of the visible world and reciprocity of affection. But if this gladness became rational and deliberate, we should at once perceive that it had lost its healthfulness ; and if it became a motive for action it would be to us a monstrosity. So in the sight of the angels must their lives be in whom age has worn away the child-like spirit ; and who, after fruitless strivings after the recognition of their fellow-men, set themselves to secure peace of mind by loving God. This is not health, but disease. We see it plainly sometimes in a coarser form, when vigorous philanthropic effort is undertaken for selfish ends. Again we recognise it in the pathetic caricature of the kindly spirit when all kinds of bounty, friendliness, hospitality, and so forth, are shown at length to be merely the outcome of a craving for sympathy, or the desire for lightening the weariness of a chilled and impoverished life. And when all this fails, there may easily operate in the disappointed soul a wish to buy peace by turning to God as a last resource. This may show itself in various kinds of religious devotion and active benevolence, but it has nothing to do with the righteousness spoken of by Christ, because its centre is self, not God.

A great deal more might be said to show the depth and difficulty of the idea of righteousness here indicated. The difficulty is, of course, only apparent to those who have lost their simplicity ; but this comprises a vast majority of the human race, to whom it seems as if development depends chiefly

on their passing through a sickly stage of subjection to self, prolonged often till the time comes that the hopelessly unsatisfying slavery of the condition makes itself felt, and the immense breadth of the gulf between selfishness and unselfishness becomes apparent to the mind and soul. It is not uncommon in the time of youth for the growth of the simple idea of personality to pass into this feeling of being under a self-dominion, when it seems as if all effort, all virtue, all aspiration, must be for ever tainted with more or less of the self-disease, the egoism of adolescence. Then, it may be, the soul is ready to respond to the rich balm of the divine consolation, "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled." The wondrous promise is addressed directly to souls thus afflicted ; to whom the realisation of a pure righteousness seems a half-forgotten dream.

It is worth remarking that, in view of troubles such as these, the attenuated idea of the Deity as merely an enforcer of laws, or more particularly the deification of duty as a guide of life, is miserably inadequate. The only cure for egoism, whatever be its manifestations, is literally a self-surrender. And a surrender of self to a law is impossible without unconsciously personifying the law ; but when this is done the idea formed of the law approximates to that of the God of Christianity. Yet frequently those who have formed such an idea of God persuade themselves that the pure and lofty conception of a Personal God is impossible and unnecessary. If this text were more often taken to heart, we should hear less of a religion of duty.

One or two interesting questions remain. "They are those who will be filled" is the literal rendering of the Greek. There is something of exclusiveness about this promise ; an implication, if nothing more, that outside the class spoken of none will be filled.

We must recognise, however, that our Lord's general practice is to indicate a class of receivers of grace, and keep silence as to "those without." This practice enjoins great caution in drawing inferences as to the lot of the wicked. But we may notice how startlingly different is His method of teaching this subject from that into which hasty statements of evolutionary doctrine may lead us. As soon as we feel the fascination of the idea that sin is a stage in development, or that God cannot have created numberless beings to be eternally testimonies to the failure of grace, we are very likely to blur the distinction Christ draws between those who are satisfying a fundamental condition and those who are not; as if mankind could be viewed as part of a vast scheme of things which must finally issue in the best, whether individuals help on the process or not. Nobody can doubt the paralysing influence of some such belief at the present day. But the text bids us turn our attention to another aspect of the great problem, and we may be sure that our Lord does not guide us to any such unprofitable speculations as many of us seem to love, but bids us intently ponder on the fact that the blessing is attached to a condition; that the condition is within our power to fulfil, since it is not any great achievement in philanthropy, nor any dazzling success in converting souls to Christ, nor, primarily, any devotion of intellectual or other powers to His service, but merely a craving. And yet it is a craving which many seem only too able to quench. Thus it would be a mistake to let our discernment of the unspeakable graciousness of this saying blind us to its severity.

Again, a question may be raised whether the tone of the saying does not, to some extent, encourage the discontented frame of mind. It is undoubtedly our duty to have regard to the prevailing instinct of good

men, and we shall not be easy as to our view of these words if we interpret them as favouring the temper which is always finding fault, or if we have any suspicion that it countenances this bad quality. But it is only necessary to remember that discontentment is a habit of marking what is done amiss by others, or by oneself, or what is amiss in our surroundings, and making a grievance of it. This is sharply to be distinguished from the "divine discontent," which forbids us to acquiesce in evil, or even in imperfection, but constrains us to spare no effort after improvement. Moreover, the very righteousness towards which we yearn is noted for one great characteristic. It discerns the nobleness of all honest imperfect endeavour; it feels the loveableness of soiled and stunted characters; and believes in boundless possibilities after a whole history of woeful collapse. Nor, again, does it ever issue in what is called "morbid self-depreciation" any more than in a fatuous conceit. Both spring from the self-centred spirit; but the self-surrender of Christian righteousness, in so far as it is genuine, is very humble, but full of self-respect, which is born of the consciousness of the work of grace going on within.

"FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED"

When? The promise is certainly not limited to the life hereafter. Readers of St. Paul's Epistles, and many another outpouring of a Christian soul, will have learnt that while grace may be conceived of as a guiding or an uplifting power, giving light, or bravery, or self-command, the figure here employed is the truest. Grace is a nourishment, and the richness of its sustaining quality is determined by one thing alone—the genuineness of our desire. And the promise which is attached to a desire is a promise given to us while on earth.

“BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL”

v. 7

The word “merciful” may be taken to include in its sense some of the idea of compassion and something of readiness to forgive. It would be difficult to define at all clearly how much of one notion or the other properly belongs to the word as used by Christ. But there is reason for thinking that no such definition is necessary for a fruitful interpretation of the text ; and we may, at any rate, leave the question in abeyance for the moment and turn to the most striking thing in the saying, which is the use of the future tense in the promise, “they shall obtain mercy.”

For the truth is, we cannot free our minds from the lesson, taught by one of our Lord’s most vivid parables, concerning the duty of showing mercy to our fellow-men as depending on God’s readiness to forgive, viz., the parable of the Unmerciful Servant ; and what we there find is, that the cruelty of one man to another is brought out in its most odious light because the guilty man *had already* received mercy from God. In other words, the priority in time of the Divine gift of forgiveness is made the ground of the guilt of the unforgiving spirit manifested in a human relation. But in this text the order is apparently reversed. Are we not here encouraged to be merciful first, that we may receive mercy afterwards ?

It is of little use to set this difficulty aside by saying that God is above time, and that it is easy to fall into error by conceiving of His actions chronologically. The matter in question is of man acting and of man receiving forgiveness, and we cannot conceive of the two things except chronologically ; they both enter, so to speak, into the sphere of time, and it is idle to take refuge in transcendentalism when the difficulty is entirely one

of sequence of events as we conceive of sequence. It would be no less absurd than if, for instance, we were to argue that it makes no difference to our idea of punishment whether it is prior or subsequent to transgression.

The difficulty begins to disappear when we bear in mind that forgiveness is not ordinarily a single act, but a gradual renewal of a relation between two parties which has been disturbed or broken. This would probably be true of all instances of human forgiveness ; it is certainly true of man's realisation of the Divine forgiveness, which is not merely a cancelling of the past but an imparting of life and strength for the future. This is taught most vividly by our Lord's utterance on the occasion of His raising the paralytic man at Capernaum. "That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, He saith to the sick of the palsy, Rise, take up thy bed and walk." What is here insisted on is a parallel or analogy between the spiritual and physical worlds ; that is to say, the miracle performed on the suffering body was a restoration of decadent physical life ; and similarly forgiveness, if, as our Lord says, it is illustrated by the physical miracle, must be conceived of as a restoration of decadent spiritual life. The story of this miracle is most important in its bearing on the question suggested by our text. There are many other aspects of the subject which it illuminates, but, so far, there can be little doubt that the inevitably visible character of the exercise of one restorative act was to be taken as a proof that the claim to have acted restoratively in the inevitably invisible spiritual world was not a sham ; and this argument assumes that there is a close similarity between the two operations of the Divine power (except in point of visibility) ; in other words, the forgiveness spoken of was a restoration of spiritual life.

And if it is this, there is no sort of reason why it should not present to our experience all the signs of a gradual process. Indeed, in very many cases it certainly does. And we may add that there is a further characteristic of this forgiveness or restoration; to our consciousness it continually seems to be only beginning, and this symptom, which logically might be represented as a sign of the unreality of the process, is to the consciousness the very reverse. It is like the pulsations of growing light in a brilliant dawn before the actual sunrise, which increase the radiance throughout the heaven so suddenly and effectively that the previous stage seems as if it had been nothing.

Forgiveness is conceived of as a thing received. Supposing, then, that the richness of this gift depends, as in other cases, on our capacity of receptivity, and that that capacity, through the conquest of some difficulty, or the bearing of some suffering, or the facing of some spiritual temptation, were enlarged, we should expect the resulting experience to be like a fresh start in receiving, and this is what occurs. There is nothing to be gained in the present context by trying to analyse this further, but, so far, we may say that the showing of mercy to our fellow-men is blessed because it involves the enlarging of our own capacity for receiving more and more of God's infinite mercy; and this receiving is a process which to our consciousness seems so like a series of new beginnings that our Lord here speaks of it as a future occurrence, as if something identical, or at least similar, had not happened before. Thus the Parable and the Beatitude have to be balanced, the one against the other: and much instruction might be gained from the comparison.

So far we have been treating of forgiveness rather

than compassion. The latter expresses simply the feeling of a tender heart when brought into the presence of another's suffering, or disability, or aberration, or disease. Granted enough tender-heartedness, and the feeling of compassion would arise at the presentation of any of these in all their various manifestations. And supposing A has been injured by B, in whom malignancy of spirit has been evoked by some delusion ; yet A's compassionateness might be so active that he, disregarding altogether the personal element, as we call it—that is, the wrong done to himself—would consider simply the claim on his pity of a fellow-creature carried away by spite, or blind folly, or vanity. The feeling of pity would then be so strong and so genuine as to prevent in B the stings of wounded pride being felt at all ; and A, acting spontaneously and naturally on this feeling, would do and say exactly those things most likely to bring calm to the angry turbid spirit of his fellow-man or guidance to his waywardness, while leaving his malignity without any stimulus of irritation whatever. This is the triumph of compassion ; the natural manifestation of love in the presence of sin's disorder ; and we notice that among men any such manifestation means a great self-conquest, a crushing down of the hot desire for self-assertion, or of such vindictiveness as social convention allows ; and in self-conquest we find the surest hope of our capacity for reception of grace being enlarged.

Thus, gathering up the two notions of the gradual restorative action of the Divine compassion, together with that of the broadening, bracing influence of the exercise of forbearance towards our fellow-men, or rather of the active manifestation of love towards their manifold needs, we may paraphrase the Beatitude thus : Blessed are those who by self-

conquest and self-forgetfulness are enabled to show loving-kindness to their fellows (in spite of the most varied provocation, scorn, neglect, slander, suspicion, wanton and flagitious outrage, or the pettiest of small private indignities), for so their capacity for receiving the Divine love, which must manifest itself as compassion and forgiveness, will be enlarged.

It may be objected that in this exposition too much depends on kindness being shown after provocation, and that mercifulness is thus made almost equivalent to forgiveness, whereas it ought to include quite as much, and perhaps a great deal more, of the element of simple compassion, irrespective of provocation. This last contention may be admitted. But, as has been implied, the central meaning of the verse is not materially modified. The problem is to trace the connexion between the exercise of either compassion or forgiveness, and the enlarging of our capacity for receiving a corresponding spiritual gift from God ; and we find that this result is to be expected from the exercise of mercifulness in whichever of the two senses it may be understood. But there is this difference : compassion, pure and simple, may end in merely feeling something in presence of suffering, and, as has often been remarked, the indulgence of emotions which leads to no form of active self-sacrifice weakens the moral fibre and blesses neither the subject nor the object of the emotion. Self-sacrifice is inherent in the very notion of forgiveness, while—as to compassion—the sight of the distress of others, or of their perplexities, or even their gradual collapse, may waken at first a lively compassion, which subsequently degenerates into little more than a languid interest in something which for a short while varies the monotony of life, as in the case of those who once sat down on the hill

of Calvary and "watched Him there," men content to be spectators of life's tragedies. It may be that constant reading of harrowing narratives, or watching of tragic pieces on the stage, has some effect of this kind. In any case, there is no doubt that those of us who are easily moved to a lively compassion by the knowledge of another's suffering, have to reckon with the absolute necessity of some kind of self-conquest, in respect even of this very feeling, if we are to share in any way in the promise uttered by the Lord, and open our hearts to receive His mercy. And in this connexion self-conquest includes lavish expenditure of trouble in the giving of help, whether we give in the form of money, time, or energy. We have to inquire into facts, to control impulses to hasty and unwise giving, to forbear from squandering the emotion of pity over too wide an area, and from so missing all the strength of concentration and accurate knowledge. No warmth of feeling, however sustained, can give a dispensation from the lesson of the Cross.

"THE PURE IN HEART"

v. 8

Many true and edifying things have been said on the assumption that the quality here spoken of—purity of heart—means freedom from impurity in the narrow modern sense of the word—in short, freedom from lust. But as soon as this is stated, it is felt to be not only inadequate but misleading. The Beatitudes are wonderfully broad as well as deep in their range of meaning. There is not one which does not apply to all kinds of characters without exception, since they express different aspects of perfection, an ideal towards which the most lofty characters among

mankind can only be regarded as gradually tending. But this characteristic would be flatly contradicted if this particular statement were as restricted in scope as it is often made to appear ; that is to say, it is as certain as anything of the kind can be that many individuals enjoy an almost complete immunity from temptations of the flesh in the narrow sense. It is quite possible for men to be too far gone in slavery to personal ambition or to the spirit of gambling to be the slaves of lust as well. And to suppose that such are referred to in the promise would be a profanation. Also, even among persons of thoroughly respectable conduct, there are many who might be in this narrow sense truly described as pure in heart, and who yet may be obstinately refusing to set themselves against other temptations than coarseness, such as indolence, coldness or contempt of others, refined selfishness and the like, and so making no apparent effort to rise above the conventional ideal. The truth is that if a glorious promise were attached to what we call a negative quality, mere freedom from a vice, it would be a most bewildering utterance, hopelessly inapplicable in its plain sense to the facts of life as we know them, and unlike the other Beatitudes which are clearly positive in character.

It remains therefore to accept the meaning of the Greek word, as ordinarily used by classical writers, unmixed with alien elements, hence single or *simple* in heart. What is meant by simplicity ? The first and most important answer to be made is that it is a quality that baffles analysis, because it is simple and not complex ; there is no disentangling of divers threads possible or reconciliation of opposites. We sometimes say of such characters that they are distinguished by a grand simplicity, and beyond that we cannot go. But there are certain symptoms worth

noting of this rare and excellent quality. There must be a point of contact between it and the simpleness which stands for a kind of folly; and it is easy to see that it lies in the negative quality of guilelessness, the absence of any consciousness of a motive behind action which is not professed and open. This guilelessness, being natural and spontaneous, is very likely to misconstrue the mixed motives which play a large part among mankind in the practical affairs of life, and to be somewhat at the mercy of intrigue and selfishness and hence ignorant of facts, the knowledge of which is necessary unless endeavour is to be seriously crippled. It is the prolongation of the childish, as distinguished from the child-like spirit, into manhood; and though there is something very near akin to what is admirable and forceful in it, and to the strength which unselfishness alone can exercise, yet our Lord in His well-known saying, "Be ye wise as serpents and harmless as doves," emphatically confirms the view that the ignorance of ordinarily accepted notions and principles of conduct which we call simpleness is a disability, and against it His servants must be on their guard. None the less it is true, that the total absence of self-interest, of even being interested in self, is a great source of strength, since men are to be led when they find they are not suspected.¹

The best symptom of simplicity, however, is the freedom from what St. James calls double-mindedness, *διψυχία*. In two of his dialogues Plato speaks of a certain principle of conduct as essential to the highest life, and he calls it *οἰκειοπραγία*, or the doing of that which is naturally the fitting thing for the individual to do, that for which nature intended him, as we say. And when we reflect on the prevalence of a certain

¹ Cf. carefully, St. John ii. 25.

distraction in men's lives, the being drawn asunder after divergent ideals, we can agree with the Greek in his high estimate of this characteristic of simplicity. There belongs to it the thoroughly satisfying and permanently interesting quality which we speak of as individuality—a man's being "always himself."

Other tokens of purity of heart or simplicity might be enumerated. What we call a simple life generally means a life satisfied with few material goods, content to do without two of such where one is sufficient; and the notion is reinforced by the fact that such a way of living leaves the spirit free to strive upwards, because the spell of a merely worldly existence is weakened, and the pursuit of the single highest ideal made easier.

This suffices to show in what sense the expression "pure in heart" may be taken. But when we come to the second part of the Beatitude, which promises to all who are thus designated the reward of the Divine vision, a serious difficulty is at once felt. Briefly it is this: Whereas in all the other Beatitudes the human beings described are those who work together with God in the active exercise of some supreme virtue, humility, mercy, yearning for goodness, and so forth, are we not thinking of what in this quality of simplicity is distinctly a Divine gift, a natural grace, as we call it? Is it not, moreover, one towards which any striving would be fatal to acquirement? for who ever succeeded in being simple by hard effort? If this be so, we seem to have in the other Beatitudes promises held out to those who co-operate with God in working out their own salvation, but in this one a promise of peculiar richness held out to those who are simply the recipients of a peculiar endowment.

Clearly, we touch here on a subject in which definite

precision is not to be expected. We cannot know why some men seem to inherit qualities which bring happiness with them, while others are weighted with a disposition which prevents them either from understanding their fellow-men, or from the feeling of being upheld by communion with God ; and in many cases there is much of reward apparently attached to conditions of birth, not to those of attainment. This is part of the mystery of the relation of the finite to the infinite (Westcott). But in respect of the quality of simplicity the difficulty is lessened by the fact that attainment, though not the result of what we ordinarily call effort, yet is evidently a possibility. People not very unfrequently grow in this grace as in others. The subtle prevailing taint of egoism dies slowly away under some unseen gentle influence which no Christian can think of as other than the operation of the Holy Spirit. It would be a poor and flat state of things if mortal insight could explain this. Enough for us the fact that the very achievement which seemed in the nature of things to be hopelessly impossible is not so. The soul which was worried and weakened by introspection and yearning after an empty phantom of vain glory finds its centre elsewhere, and, while ceasing to struggle after simplicity, receives it ; much as all deep happiness is only given as an accompaniment of effort, not as its first object. And if it is asked what sort of life do we find to be thus enriched, the answer is the life of prayer.

But we cannot leave the solemn and gracious words without a closer consideration of the promise, " Shall see God." The first inclination of a restless and materialistic generation is to hold this promise cheap, as if it held out an unsubstantial boon, unsuited to the rough antagonisms of the world. Is it what we *want*? Is it not the reward of a purely contemplative

life, the hope of a mystic, alien to the mind of a busy practical Englishman ? Perhaps we may concede that this promise is concerned rather more directly with the next world than the other Beatitudes are. But we are bound to see its fulfilment in this world if we can, and there will be no difficulty in doing so if we do not narrow our conception of God. First there is the intellectual side to the promise. God is the Truth, and the seeing of God is not only the satisfaction of what we call religious aspiration, but the illumination of the mind by the Divine light. It is easy for us to fall into a way of crudely classifying the desires of our nature into religious, intellectual and physical appetites, as if there were some incompatibility between the three departments of life. But how frequently Christ insists on the knowledge of God being an illumination of the intellect ! and if we bear in mind the immense amount of intellectual hunger prevailing among the foremost nations of the earth, and the unquiet restlessness often due to its not being satisfied, we shall cease to imagine that there is anything in this promise alien to our ordinary needs. No one can gauge the impoverishment of our community life which results from failure to set the intellectual and religious aspirations of mankind in close relation to each other ; nor is there anything more worthy of admiration than the harmonious blending of the two, the working of the conviction based on our Lord's saying, "I am the Truth." It is seen when progress in what we call science, instead of being wildly ascribed to the powers of human intellect exercised independently of God, is felt to be the gradual reception of a living spiritual strength, increasing not in proportion to the arrogant self-satisfaction of a mind conscious of its own power, but according as the knowledge of the Divine is

received with all humility as an unlooked-for and unmerited blessing.

And if this fundamental belief were more securely held, we should not be perplexed by the phenomenon of characters to which a clear revelation of goodness has been given without apparently any sense of a personal relation to God. These are generally looked on as irreligious but moral characters ; but yet who can doubt that they, too, are recipients of the promise of this Beatitude ? They are in a position to go forward in the nearer apprehension of the vision of God, though the inward rapture may be for them reserved till after death. Their temptation is to set up an antagonism between themselves and other recipients of God's bounty, who are allowed to feel more distinctly the touch of personal contact ; and this temptation is often increased by religious people harshly insisting that where the personal sense is wanting no vision of God has been vouchsafed. Rather we may avoid crude classification, but recognise that, though there is evidence of defect in such cases, yet everything points to this particular condition being simply a stage in growth.

THE PEACEMAKERS

v. 9

Before we can be assured of the deep truth contained in this saying, it will be well to notice that, if it stood in the New Testament as the solitary pronouncement on the subject of Peace, we should certainly feel that it failed to explain some of our fundamental instincts concerning the place of struggle and discord in the higher life of mankind. It is, of course, easy to look abroad on the world and contemplate the unending havoc and misery caused by

divisions and strife, as well as the crippling of much honest effort caused by petty jealousies, and then to sigh for the advent of peace on earth and good-will among men ; but nevertheless, when we have secured peace, we are sooner or later bound to admit that it has not turned out such a blessing as was expected. It has been found to lack certain bracing, purging influences, which are given only by the stress and disquiet inseparable from a state of discord. The first subject, therefore, which the words suggest is the relation in which the two ideas stand to each other in the New Testament—peace and disunion.

We are reminded at once of the famous words, “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth ? I tell you, nay, but rather division.” Christ is plainly correcting here a misconception prevalent about the Messiah, that He was coming to inaugurate an era of peace for all mankind. But we may suppose that if the craving for peace is sanctioned, as it certainly is in our text and elsewhere, then division may be looked on as a preparatory stage, necessary if the subsequent peace is to be stable. This would mean that while *strife* is the outcome of sin and wrongheadedness, *division* or disunion may be thought of as a stage in development, a mark of imperfection but also of progress. It is true that in Matt. x. 34 our Lord emphasises the fact, that the result of His coming is to bring not only division but strife ; but this need not be taken as a sanctioning of strife, as if it were an innocent thing, any more than the saying, “It must needs be that offences come.” Indeed, in the passage in St. Luke there is a very striking reminder of the description of the Day of Pentecost. In that account (Acts ii. 3) we are told that “there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder (*διαμεριζόμεναι*) like as of fire.” In the Gospel (Luke xii. 49) our Lord, just before

prophesying division (*διαμέρισμα*) as the result of His coming, was speaking of casting fire on the earth.¹ Similarly, as we saw on p. 71, the national spirit involving conflict and disunion is apparently recognised by Christianity as a necessary stage in the life of humanity, and yet one through which we are bound to pray that we may speedily pass. The subject cannot be fathomed. It is part of the mystery of evil and its place in the development of good in the world, and here Christ sanctions that aspiration, whereby we crave for a state of being in which craving will have ceased.

Now if peace may be thought of as an end to which we aspire, later in time than the discord through which we are passing, we gain some light on the meaning of two important texts which help to give us the New Testament idea of peace : James iii. 17, "The wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable"—that is to say, pure by *separation* from defilement, as in a stage preliminary to that of peaceableness, which is characterised not by separation but by union. This is as if the heavenly wisdom, when lodged among men, had to pass through a preparation by being separated off from the world before beginning its work of reconciling and blending unharmonious elements. One is reminded of Christ's thirty years of growth, away from the world in Nazareth, preparatory to the work of the ministry—the reconciling or atonement of the world to God.² And among ourselves many a noble adult character, in whom we recognise the power of the peacemaker, has had to pass through a long period of something like separation, pure and inactive, during which it would have been fatally

¹ Alford *in loc.*

² Mayor on James iii. 17. Cf. also Psalm lxxxv. 10 ; Isaiah xxxii. 17 ; xxvi. 3.

foolish to call upon it to exercise the strength of maturity, the wonderful gift of reconciling the warring elements of human life. Moreover, the text hints at a relation, plainly indicated elsewhere, between *truth* (given by the heavenly wisdom) and peace. Compare St. Paul's words : Romans viii. 6, "The *mind* of the spirit is life and peace"; that is, the state of intellectual repose consequent on a recognition of harmony underlying contradictions in thought.

The other important text is 1 Peter i. 22, which confirms the double view of peace given by St. James : "Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently." Here the apostle reminds his readers that they have passed through the preliminary stage of separation from defilement, and have reached the point at which they are called upon, not only to be at peace but to make peace. "Purified *unto* unfeigned love," passing on to the manifestation of the peace within them, so as to be agents of reconciliation in the world, and this without the slightest want of sincerity, growing in a love for others, which is free from all taint of self-interest. But he emphasises, more clearly than St. Paul in Romans viii., that the power which had brought about in them this change may be described from their side, so to speak, as "obedience to the *truth*." They were in his view people with sound notions about God, which had been honestly acted on in their lives; they had not been "disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

We need not go further to be satisfied as to this much of Scriptural doctrine concerning peace. It is a quality in human life brought to maturity by the separation from defilement, which depends on obedience to the highest law revealed to us; and when it

reaches maturity it becomes active in its effect on others ; the soul first becomes peaceable, then a maker of peace. And it is plain that great emphasis is laid on that aspect of peace which we think of as intellectual. The connexion between truth and peace indicates a freedom from restlessness of thought and from the disquiet arising from contradictory and confused ideas. Other aspects of peace may be easily seen in the hints given in the New Testament ; and we might define it roughly as the effect of God's nearness to an untroubled conscience, producing the sense of forgiveness, of moral tranquillity, of jealousies overcome, and of intellectual consistency. It is then worth remarking that there is for once a traceable sequence in the order of the Beatitudes. The text preceding this one states the blessing promised to the pure in heart ; and though the Greek word is not the same as that which speaks distinctly of separation from defilement, yet it is a striking illustration of the Scriptural idea of peace, that just before the blessing promised to the peacemakers should come the one promised to the single-hearted or pure.

And the difference in the exact promises deserves attention. If we take St. Peter's pregnant words as our guide, we shall be prepared to find that if Matt. v. 8 denotes the stage of innocence preliminary to maturity, "obedience to the truth" has been the secret of healthy, quiet growth, and that the reward attached to this obedience is with perfect appropriateness described as "seeing God"—that is to say, the unclouded vision of the Truth itself is the reward of those who have grown in obedience to the broken lights vouchsafed to them in this life. But when our Lord touches on the matured peace-making power, which is like the mental energy of an adult compared to the quiet growth of a guileless youth, then how different the

promise : "They shall be called the sons of God." This phrase now requires our attention.

The fact is that the power of "making peace" is so wonderful a thing that we see in it something almost of a creative endowment. We defined peace as the sense of God's nearness to an untroubled conscience. But the peacemaker is one who gives or encourages that sense to a troubled conscience by showing how reconciliation with God may be won, or to a harassed intellect by revealing the infinite satisfaction to the reason of men which revelation gives ; or to the proud sensitive spirit smarting under a sense of wrong and hot with a vindictive flame, by bringing home to the inmost thoughts the ineffable graciousness of the Saviour's work of forgiveness and love for all sinners, till the hard scornful temper yields to the spell of the Spirit of God. And so in many other ways to a few rarely endowed human beings is it permitted to bring into a brother's soul that which can only be described as the sense of the indwelling Holy Spirit. And is not that something of a creative act ? Does it not lift the agent on to a level so lofty as to remind us of the plane on which the Lord Himself worked in bringing the Divine down into the depths of human life ?

For in very truth there is in the power of reconciliation, or bringing harmony among the turbid restless elements of human life, that which baffles all analysis, and leaves ordinary men amazed and humiliated, but thankful that God has "given such power unto men."

"Sons of God." Professor Dalman insists (in connexion with Matt. xi. 27) that this title points to an exclusive committal to Jesus of a revelation to be made to man. "He who stands in so uniquely close a relation to God is the only possible mediator of the

kind."¹ Elsewhere² in commenting on Matt. xiii. 28, he says : " In this case the sons are those who have in themselves the nature of the father." It has also been pointed out by others that this word for " son " differs from that of " child " by expressing not so much the community of nature as participation in status, dignity and power. This idea is perfectly appropriate to the explanation of the word " peace-maker " given above.

THE PERSECUTED

v. 10

The last benediction gave us a glimpse of man at his highest, triumphing by sheer spiritual power over the forces of disorder and confusion which work perplexity within and suffering without. Here how different is the picture ! No quality is spoken of ; no power, no effectiveness or success. Man is regarded simply as the victim of others' cruelty. He is not described as in any way active, but as the passive recipient of an absolutely undeserved hostility ; as a sufferer of wrongs, not only while he behaves righteously, but because of his righteousness, and in a plight which ordinarily excites nothing but the deepest commiseration. For we must give the word persecution its full meaning. As we " sit at home at ease," thinking or reading about the onslaughts which some group of our fellow-creatures have made on their brethren, the savage injustice, the ruthless violence, and horrible malignity which have been shown, or when we picture to ourselves the heroism of a Polycarp, or a Blandina, or countless others, we are strongly tempted to invest the facts with an unreal

¹ " The Words of Jesus," p. 283. English translation, 1902.

² Ibid., p. 115.

glamour, as if heroism were always upborne by a sense of its own greatness; and so we enormously underrate the acuteness of the suffering, its dismal ignominy and blank desolation. A sustained effort of imagination is required to bring us anywhere near a realisation of the truth, and in these words of the Saviour the expression "for righteousness' sake" implies that, in addition to the suffering and loss inflicted on the victim of persecution, we have to suppose a burning sense of injustice to be added, the sense of love scorned, of high ideals grossly misunderstood, of overtures to peace construed as provocation. The thought of all this enables us to feel the greatness of this last paradox in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are they that have been persecuted."

It should be noticed that alone among these great sentences this one speaks in the perfect tense, "have been persecuted," and that the reward is in the present tense instead of the future, in this respect recalling the first Beatitude, which it resembles in other ways. With regard to the perfect tense a superficial interpretation would suggest that our Lord refrained from speaking of persecution as a blessed thing to endure, but only to have endured, as if it were beyond the power of humanity to discern the blessedness while the hour of suffering lasted. But this would be contrary to the drift of all the pronouncements. It is inconceivable that Christ should exclude any department of life from His benediction. Rather we may say that the effects of this particular form of suffering are not appreciable till after it is over, since it is not a question simply of heroic endurance, but of a certain temper fostered by suffering and the infliction of wrong. Therefore we have to give our attention not to the martyr standing at the stake with his eyes raised to heaven while the flames begin to curl around

his limbs, but rather to some obscure follower of Christ who finds himself after a buffeting storm of hostility deprived of the good things of life—home, comforts, family perhaps, and means of livelihood—by the malignity of others, and all because he had been constant to his principles and loyal in his devotion to the service of his Master ; and, moreover, had never failed to show even to his enemies all due consideration and brotherly love ; since by some dire perversity of spirit they had found in this very friendliness and forbearance which he showed nothing but an incitement to further hatred. This picture corresponds exactly to the words of the text, and we shall have to ask what is the temper of mind which after such grievous buffetings can merit the benediction uttered by Christ.¹

But let us first observe that the Divine Teacher deals in a most impressive way with our ordinary judgments on this particular form of injustice. Huxley once remarked bitterly on the insane tendency of mankind first to put to death their greatest men and then to worship them. He uttered his most caustic

¹ Zahn's footnote on the participle *δεδιωγμένοι* is puzzling. “The present participle *διωκομένοι* is demanded by the sense, but is wholly unattested and not inserted even by the post-canonical Evangelists (Clem. Strob. iv. 41); and for the perfect I know of no other justification except that the Hebrew equivalents (which are given) may be rendered equally correctly either in this way or in that. The Hebrew and Aramaic participles are properly timeless, though the active represent predominantly a present, the passive a perfect tense.” This leaves us exactly where we were. If the Evangelist has so free a choice between *διωκομένοι* and *δεδιώγμένοι*, why did he choose the latter unless he believed that it represented Christ's thought better than the former? If the Aramaic would have given no sort of indication, is it not possible that some oral tradition may have survived and determined the Greek tense? Or perhaps a memorandum of the saying written in Greek may have favoured the perfect participle. In any case, I see no reason why the latter Greek tense should not be strictly rendered. We are not at present in a position to go behind it.

verdicts against the persecutor. Nowadays, of course, there are some found who will make excuses for any conduct however hateful, as it is considered that the limits to toleration should be removed as far back as possible; but in either case we are prone to pronounce judgment on the wrong-doer. That is our point of interest. And if we turn our attention to his victim, it is only to express unqualified commiseration. How differently Christ looks at the two parties! He declares that the unhappy victim of this peculiarly complex and heartless injury is blessed, and as to him who inflicts the injury He is silent, in both ways reversing our human way of dealing with these dramas when they come to our notice. We either excuse or condemn the one, as if to express some kind of judgment on him were an irresistible instinct. Christ leaves him aside without a word, with a silence, as in other cases, so severe as to be awful.

Again, it seems clear that in three respects this last Beatitude recalls the first. (1) There is a strong similarity to the quality or condition on which the benediction is spoken, poor or poor in spirit well describing the state of those who have suffered persecution; (2) these two sentences alone are followed by a reward spoken of in the present tense; (3) that reward is described in the same words. It is as if the Saviour wished to present the picture in a less abstract light to His audience. The description "poor in spirit" gains immensely in distinctness when we contemplate it under the words "who have been persecuted," and remember as well as we can what persecution was in those days. It is not unlike the sudden vividness with which a picture on a wall flashes upon our eyes sometimes when we change our position and look at it from a different angle. And we might almost suppose our Lord was answer-

ing some unspoken question in the minds of His hearers, such as this: how is poverty of spirit acquired? We believe the word of blessing to be true—is there no clue to the way in which the necessary condition is to be fulfilled? And the answer is briefly, Yes, by having passed through the tremendous experience of being the wholly undeserving recipient of human violence, enmity and spite. That experience may be taken to be the most effectual of all preparations for the poverty of spirit, mentioned above, with which the Beatitudes open. The enduring of persecution is therefore treated from the point of view of its effect on the mind and character; and the text entitles us to hold that the normal way for a life to develop quite securely this particular characteristic is for it to pass through the ordeal here described—acute and prolonged suffering quite undeserved; in other words, severe pain and loss added to a sense of injustice.

Indeed, it is difficult to exaggerate the emphasis which is thus laid on the first Beatitude. That emphasis is felt when we mark its place of primacy among these glorious sayings, and then observe the tone in which it is echoed and amplified in the last of them. What, then, is the temper of an ordinary faithful follower of Christ who has been through this experience? It either makes him or mars him. Unless he is filled with bitterness, wrath, and malice, it must be because he is upheld by living belief in the Fatherhood of God, and in the privilege of being allowed to be a witness for Him in an antagonistic world; where no witness can be effectual unless it excites antagonism; and where, if it is effectual, it is not because of the stir or tumult that he raises, but because of the depth of his reposed serenity—a serenity born of a sense of sonship

which is often quickened by loss of temporal joys and powers and rewards.

It is certain that if these startling words were even to a small degree apprehended by any large number of professing Christians, there would be an indescribable change in our ordinary life. An immense amount of human energy is expended in safeguarding our lives from the very influences which our Saviour pronounces to be blessed, vitalising and fertile. Not only do we labour and plan and combine together to fend off every description of pain and sorrow, but we allow ourselves to drift into complete acquiescence with the average tone of opinion around us, so as to avoid the slightest risk of any kind of collision with the ordinary standards of society; and yet, without some collision, there can hardly be the faintest beginnings of anything that could be called persecution or even annoyance from our fellow-men. And supposing that accidentally, as it were, something of the sort takes place, we are borne along by an imperious instinct so to display our own righteousness as to enlist other sympathies in our favour, with a view of abating the antagonism and making life smooth once more. Nevertheless, if now and again any one is found to rise superior to this instinct, we fall at once under his spell, and think of his conduct as wholly admirable, the fact being that nothing can shake our conviction of the truth of Christ's teaching that the reward of suffering from the blindness, the cruelty, or the perverted consciences of others may be, in spite of all appearances, a rich and glorious gain. To some of those who pass through such an experience the kingdom of Heaven belongs.

But only if they believe the principle here set forth, and there is one cause of hesitation in doing

this which may be noticed. Any one of us may feel that the real problem of life consists not so much in bearing up against the conflict brought about by our own honesty of purpose and faithful dealing, as against the chill disapproval and polite neglect which are the penalties of our own sillinesses and defects ; of our vanity and assumption and selfish ignorance of others' claims. The trouble that ensues is far too paltry to be thought of as persecution, and so far from being "for righteousness' sake," it is the direct outcome of our own folly ; and we find ourselves harbouring an unspoken misgiving that both the suffering and the reward spoken of in this text belong to lives lived on a higher plane than our own. We can imagine ourselves able to face the hostility of even the good and great in the earth if it were the outcome caused by our intrepid avowal of some noble principle ; and if that hostility were accentuated till it turned into something like persecution, we conceive of ourselves as standing firm against affliction and injury, glad to suffer for the sake of Christ. But the chance of doing this is denied us. In the first place our lives are far too humdrum and insignificant to awaken anything like hostility ; and, secondly, the neglect of which we are apt to complain is due not to anything good or brave in us, but rather to a whole series of petty timidities, little omissions, and blunders in conduct ; and probably we feel that while the cost of heroism would no doubt be grievous to bear, there is a prosaic humiliation about the penalties of dullness which is not only most persistently galling and depressing to the spirit, but seems to have no relation to the glorious promises uttered by the Lord.

The unhappiness that springs from such common experiences as these comes first from belittling their

importance. If Christ's words are true of persecution as ordinarily understood, they are true also of lives starved by neglect or frozen by the coldness of others: for though the affliction may seem trivial and ignoble when compared to the death of a Latimer, they may be on quite as heroic a level as we can attain. People are prone to hanker after the martyr's crown long before they can endure disdain from a chance acquaintance, or the malicious tittle-tattle of a country town. If in sober truth these things are to us as nothing then they need not be discussed. If on the other hand they mean a great deal, then why should we not look for the blessing promised? Clearly it is neither right nor rewarding to undergo these galling rebuffs and stinging humiliations and then to persuade ourselves that to us anyhow they are insignificant. The vigour with which we make the assertion is often a measure of its untruth. And it is well to remember that, however satisfactorily we may prove to ourselves that we are superior to insult, and lifted up too high to be reached by the shafts of others' ridicule, yet there can be no blessing attached to persecution which is not felt.

Secondly, we place ourselves outside the range of the blessing by refusing to discern its truth. When smarting from the unfriendliness of others we labour to prove that they are in the wrong. In that case we are of those to whom Christ's words directly apply. If, however, the unkindness is due to our own fault, why should it not be taken as curative in proportion to its unpleasantness, instead of being thought of merely as one of life's troubles which have no meaning, and are wholly devoid of all element of hope?

BLESSED WHEN MEN SHALL REVILE

v. 11, 12

It will be convenient to consider these words, first in their historical application to the apostles and disciples of Christ under the circumstances of the time, then in their bearing on modern life.

The saying is closely connected with the preceding, though it is not cast into the form of a Beatitude. It is an expansion of the idea of persecution. Our Lord was unwilling that His followers should suppose the blessing to be confined to the anguish of unjust persecution, as it is here shown to belong to something far more ordinary, namely, undeserved obloquy; as if some one had demurred to the statement in ver. 10 on the ground that "the persecuted" were after all, even in those days, a minority of people; and somewhat in the spirit of Esau when he cried, "Hast thou no blessing for me, oh my father?" the question was asked whether those only who should have been *persecuted* for His sake were entitled to the benediction. And the answer comes, that not only persecution but reproach and undeserved slander would under certain conditions bring the blessing. The conditions were two—first, the calumnies were to be false; secondly, they must be "because of Christ." The statement is not as before capable of application already to the hearers. Christ had said, "Blessed are they that *have been* persecuted"; now He says, "Blessed are ye when men *shall* revile you." The strict inference from this change of tense is that, whereas some who listened to Him might have been persecuted already "for righteousness' sake," it was not possible that at this stage of His ministry there should be any appreciable number who had been reviled already "for His sake" or "because of Him"; but it was a cer-

tainty that that was a condition of discipleship which time would provide.

“Inasmuch as your reward in Heaven is great.” Is this simply a promise to them of some unexplained recompense after death? And is there not some allusion to the Jewish idea of a reward literally stored up in some invisible heaven for the faithful Israelite —an allusion which would be repeated in vi. 20, xix. 21? It is held that “in heaven” stands for “with God” (cf. Matt. vi. 1), and Jesus merely means that the recompense of completed work, or the compensation for what is sacrificed in this world, is made ready by God even now. Any mystical pre-existence of “reward” or “treasure” is in no way contemplated.¹ Thus the form of words in which this promise is couched leaves it open to us to understand the reward as some blessing to be bestowed by God in this life as well as in the next, the absence of a verb in the Greek sentence pointing towards this interpretation. The promise is supported by a reference to the experience of the prophets of old, but the relation of the clauses to each other is far from easy to understand. Literally, they would be rendered, “Rejoice and be exceeding glad; inasmuch as great your reward in the heavens; for so persecuted they the

¹ Dalman, p. 206 sqq. English translation, and for more startling instances, p. 129 sqq. It is noteworthy that our Lord, when His teaching touched on subjects dealt with in Rabbinical literature in great detail and much coarse realism, was not careful to avoid expressions which show that He was aware of the Rabbinical ideas. Not unfrequently, as in the above passages, He chooses words open to misapprehension from the Jewish point of view, but perfectly adapted to their purpose of giving the clearest instruction to “all nations.” It is most striking that in using the very terminology of the Rabbis He should have given an universal tone to every saying, and the Gospel instances of this supreme mastery of the subject should be compared with St. Paul’s treatment of the place of women in the Church and that of the new Jerusalem in the Apocalypse. Cf. Edersheim, ii. p. 438.

prophets which were before you." How is this last clause to be understood as depending on the previous one?

The reward of the faithful and patient endurance of the undeserved suffering, calumny, and misunderstanding to which a servant of Christ like St. Paul was subjected may be described as an ever-deepening sense of increasing nearness to God, and of being upborne by Him, so that no matter what the keenness of the trial may be there is a profound tranquillity of spirit resting on trustfulness which nothing can disturb (2 Cor. xii. 10). Concerning this there is a vast amount of testimony given by heroes of Christianity of all ages to the effect that the tranquillity and inward joy are dependent on the suffering and fostered by it. Therefore when Christ reminded His hearers of the instance of the prophets, it is as if He said: "There is a blessing attached not only to persecution but to evil repute and slander, depending on the spirit in which it is borne. The blessing is a sense of resting on God's 'everlasting arms,' which is deepened by the suffering. You may be assured that the reward is great, because the prophets of old passed through the same kind of experience of unmerited suffering, and you yourselves know that their recompense was full and glorious."

It is to be noticed that if there is any logical connexion in the instance of the prophets which is here adduced, some such clause as this last is indispensable. The Saviour appeals to His hearers' conviction that with the prophets all was well. "When you suffer, know that your reward is great; because the prophets suffered, and . . . their reward { is } great." Such is the quasi-syllogistic form in which the promise is cast, opening out questions, not to be

determined here, how far and on what grounds the disciples were assured of the richness of the prophets' reward ; whether it was received by all and in equal measure, and how far it could be described as a quickened sense of the Divine support, or was identified in the consciousness of later generations with something less spiritual. There was a time when the book of Deuteronomy was compiled, when probably the recompense of heroism would have been conceived of as prosperity in this world ; but as years went on, our Lord introduced quite other notions of reward into men's minds— notions anticipated, doubtless, by many passages in the Psalms, and here hinted at for the first time in the Gospels by an appeal to history from the most spiritual point of view. The more the disciples reflected on the life and death of the prophets of old, the more they would feel that the appeal was justified ; in other words, that there was something in the terrific ordeal through which those great witnesses passed which issued in joy either in this world or the next—a joy springing from no visible or easily stated facts, but to be explained only by the personal relation of the soul to God.

Without this invisible result of suffering, nothing could be more unintelligible than our Lord's exhortation, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad." He was speaking to men who were shortly to undergo acute suffering ; not only that of persecution, which sometimes may be represented as heroic, but the suffering which springs from commonplace dull ill-treatment of one man by others, from calumny and false witness ; and by way of assurance He points to the history of great and holy men who had been through grim, harrowing afflictions, perhaps as painful as those in store for the apostles, but like them principally in being quite undeserved. Taken by itself, without re-

ference to some unearthly consolation to be received, such a parallel from the past, so far from being any support to the command, could be nothing but a cruel mockery. Yet there is that in human experience which ratifies the words as a message of boundless encouragement.

To understand this better we may modernise the words, "Blessed are all kinds of unpopularity and ill-treatment received from others, if only they are undeserved and inflicted because of Christ." Then follows the appeal to the will in the matter of gladness, which, like love, we are apt to regard wrongly as quite independent of the will, though this is against the view presented in the New Testament. "Rejoice and be exceeding glad: inasmuch as great is your reward in heaven." That is a reward quite unlike a visible earthly reward; not at all the same, therefore, as a restoration of what was lost. "For consider the great and holy men among My followers: have they not been so ill-treated and slandered? and no one doubts that they are blessed." One great difficulty is in the condition, "Because of Me." In a vague way we conceive of these words as appropriate to the Apostles, but not to ourselves; imagining, probably, their age to be more unlike our own than it really was. But in our own life we find it impossible to be sure that we fulfil the condition. In other words, the disfavour, neglect, or harshness from which people suffer they often feel to be partly deserved, as the issue of their own selfishness or folly, and the poignant disappointment which attends this does not seem to be forbidden by Christ's words. This is true. But the words of our Lord do not touch this particular subject. What exactly do we gain from them as to our behaviour under unprovoked ill-treatment, slights, and evil report?

In trying to comfort a friend who is suffering from these trials we generally ignore the words of Christ, whose promised blessing depends on a compensation or reward which is "in heaven," that is, not "on earth"; we strive to show that on earth and before long things will come right, and often forgetting altogether that the sufferer is under orders to "rejoice and be exceeding glad," we provoke him to wrath simply by insisting along with him on the falseness of the slander or the injustice of the feeling shown towards him. Better if we reminded him that the words "Because of Me" contain something of the sense, "For My sake," and that in realising this lies the certain hope of the promised blessing; not in whittling away the facts or viewing our conduct in a favourable light, but in the assurance that the very thing which gives to such experiences their peculiarly galling character, viz. their injustice, is that on which the blessing depends, and through which we may believe that His kingdom is advanced on earth. No one denies that the trial is supremely bitter; but how vast would be the difference if men entered upon it with their minds filled with a conviction that the truth is as Christ states it! And when He bids us to think over the prophets and their relation to their contemporaries, this is an exhortation to the study of the history of saintly heroes; since from that study we get the corroboration of the principle that such greatness among men as is fruitful for good always shows a power of being unshaken by calumny and ill-usage, and that the inner tranquillity and joy of soul is fostered and deepened by the suffering.

The change in the wording from "for righteousness' sake" to "for My sake" is noteworthy. It is the earliest recorded instance of the lofty claims which

Jesus advances on His own behalf. The accumulated testimony of saints and Christian heroes to the power of the personal relation with Christ makes it hard for us to imagine the wholly unexpected character of such a saying as this. The Galilean carpenter begins His great Discourse by affirming that the most vexatious and depressing of life's trials is pregnant with blessing, but that the blessing depends on it being borne "for His sake." Whence was this astounding assurance prompted?

There is a tendency for those who pass through such an ordeal to envy others who seem able to combine genuine goodness with the favour of the world. They need not. These latter, if they are worth envying, care not one straw for popularity, and that is the chief reason why they are popular, men thus perpetually erring in judgment and perpetually correcting the error. It is also very doubtful if the power of lifting mankind is not essentially weakened by popularity. At any rate, a popular prophet or saint leaves little behind him that requires to be permanently recorded ; in other words, it is not to the examples of such that Christ directs our attention.

II

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

v. 13

EVEN after the lapse of centuries the intense vividness and abrupt challenge of these words arrests the attention in a most striking way. It was the first instance of the Lord's unapproachable power of using as telling images the commonest objects of ordinary life. What were the associations of salt to a Jew of those days?¹ However universal be the

¹ "Owing to its wide distribution on the earth, salt has been known from the very earliest times. It is frequently mentioned in the Bible. The Jewish law commanded the people to season the meat offering with salt (Lev. ii. 13). The Jews used a very impure argillaceous kind of rock salt, from which they extracted the salt by means of water, leaving the clay as mud. This mud still contained some salt, and was either used directly for agricultural purposes, or was allowed to lie on the manure heaps before being used, where, after prolonged exposure, in presence of nitrogenous matter, the salt was partially converted into sodium nitrate. Hence we find the expressions in Matt. v. 13; Luke xiv. 34."—"Dictionary of Chemistry," s.v. "Salt."

This passage throws some light on the very difficult phrases "Salt of the earth" and concerning the salt "losing its savour." The first may mean literally the salt mixed with clay. But if this was the ordinary idea of salt which the Jews formed, it was quite unnecessary for the words *τῆς γῆς* to be added. It appears that "salt" by itself would have denoted the mixture. There is reason, therefore, to prefer Zahn's interpretation (footnote *in loc.*), whereby *τῆς γῆς* is not part of the parable, but denotes mankind: just as below, in "light of the world," the word "light" is (like "salt") part of the parable, but "of the world" is not. As to the "salt losing its savour" there is no such thing possible in the case of what we mean by salt; but obviously it could and often did happen in Palestine, where the word denoted the earthy mixture, and when it happened there

teaching of Christ, this question demands an answer. First, it was a symbol of incorruptibility, or, more precisely, of that which had the natural quality of resisting decay, not only in itself but in other things; and this quality it might lose. And when it lost its distinctive quality it became perfectly useless, even as manure (Luke xiv. 34). But there was a special use to which the fresh salt was put. It was sprinkled over the meat destined for the Temple altar to preserve it from corruption.¹

Thus the members of the Kingdom of God that was

was left simply a mass of mud or clay. "Wherewith shall it be salted?" means, then, "how shall the salt be restored to the earthy stuff?" There remain, however, two obscure expressions in St. Luke xiv. 35: "It is fit neither for the land" (the "Dictionary" seems to contradict this) "nor yet for the dunghill." Here again Zahn comes to the rescue. When it is said that this mud from which salt has been withdrawn is useless for the land, the comparison is not between two sorts of salt, as if the mineral itself were ever good for manure (on the contrary, the expression saltiness is equivalent to barrenness: Ps. cvii. 34; Job xxxix. 6, &c.), but between this mud and other sorts of waste stuff, such as excrement, decomposed flesh, &c., which are used for manure. On this point the extract given above from the "Dictionary" is far less satisfactory. Similarly, "nor yet for the dunghill." The mixture was gathered from the saliferous clays which rise along the slopes of the Dead Sea (the *Ἄλες Σοδομῆνος* referred to in the "Talmud") a good deal higher than the present level of the water, and which indicate a former much wider extension. These were described by the French geologist, Lartel, some years ago. (I owe this and the reference to the "Dictionary" to my former colleague, Mr. R. Hornby.) There would be three stages to be distinguished: (1) the "argillaceous rock salt" prior to washing; this was salt, mainly mixed with mud; (2) after treatment, mud, mainly mixed with salt; (3) simply mud. Now it appears that the expression, "fit for the dunghill," refers to the process explained by the "Dictionary"; but not as if the spreading on the dunghill was to benefit the manure any more than there was a spreading on the land to benefit the latter. It means that the simple mud cannot be made into anything useful by the exposure. Therefore, to be quite precise, the paraphrase would be: "Mud (No. 3) from which salt has been washed away is not like other waste stuff fit for manuring land; nor, like No. 2, worth exposing on a dunghill that some further chemical change may take place, since this cannot happen. It is therefore thrown away."

¹ Edersheim: "The Temple," pp. 84, 90, 134.

to be were addressed by our Lord, as forming a group endowed with a mysterious power of so acting on their surroundings as to check the tendencies to corruption which are ceaselessly at work in the world. And to this is added the beautiful thought that mankind, on whom this group is to act, is naturally destined as an offering to God, in sacrifice. That is the idea ; and if it seems to us to be out of correspondence with the facts of life, as we know them, that must be because the antidote to the corruption has acted so feebly ; it has lost much of its saltiness. And a little reflection will show us that in an ordinary way there is a great deal of random and useless complaint as to the world being out of joint. Good people have a way of pointing out to each other the precise reasons why the corrupt behaviour of "the world" is corrupt and mischievous ; they cast their blame on the mass of mankind for exhibiting the symptoms of corruption, and with a never-ceasing astonishment at the recurrence of these symptoms seem to think the problem is somehow solved by their enumeration. We might as well be astonished at the signs of corruption in butchers' meat left to decay ; or, rather, left in contact with some salt substance which has lost its savour, and so does nothing to arrest decay. There is nothing wrong in the constitution of things, in so far as the closeness of contact between those elements which preserve and those which require preserving is concerned. The salt is there, and it is sprinkled on the meat : the children of the Kingdom are in perpetual touch with "the world," and if, nevertheless, the corruption continues it is not because the latter is doing anything surprising, but solely because the purifying power has died out from the former ; and how terribly tragic the facts become when we remember further,

that these swarms of living beings are not simply so many forms of existence, which are thus left to sink into decay, but are lives intended to be offered to God in sacrifice, as being clean and wholesome, destined for the highest of all possible objects in virtue of their capacity to be kept pure. And all the time they are only fulfilling the natural law of their being in thus decaying. If the situation is to be changed, the salt with which they come into contact must have saltiness.

We are now able to discern the connexion between this parabolic utterance and the Beatitudes which preceded it. Doubtless, it is easy to overpress such connexions. The surpassing vividness of our Lord's style of teaching, its picturesqueness and brevity, seem sometimes hardly compatible with a clear, logical sequence, since popular discourses gain little or nothing in effectiveness from being drawn on logical lines. But though this is so, and may be taken as a sign to what a small extent ordinary life is ruled by logic, it is most desirable to trace a line of thought where possible, even though it seems to have been disregarded by our Lord, or at least intentionally subordinated to the great requisites of clearness and brevity.

In the Beatitudes, then, there was an impressive statement of the blessedness of those who in their character fulfil certain conditions of the divine kingdom, though the doing of this involves a sharp conflict with worldly ideals. And the description ends with a statement of this opposition issuing inevitably in active hostility between the world and the kingdom. What, then, was to be the hope and what the guiding fact as to this relation between the kingdom and the world which encompasses it? It is that the new society has in it the power of purification as an en-

dowment, and can exercise that power by simply living its own true life in contact with the world. The world is not to be truckled to nor imitated, nor flouted, nor feared, nor despaired of, by members of the kingdom, but preserved from corruption.

There is thus unfolded before the minds of the Galilean crowds a prospect of magnificent grandeur and hopefulness. But immediately the warning comes. This purifying power may be lost; and, if it is, the individual or the community becomes not only dead but hopelessly useless, even for the functions of ordinary dead things. Its own decay has nothing restorative about it, just as stale salt-slag is unfitted for manure, and indeed such influence as it has at all on its surroundings is bad; it is at best only innocuous, and that is when it is ground to powder by the feet of heedless passers-by.¹ By this terrible image, reported by St. Luke, Christ balances the almost unlimited encouragement contained in the opening words of our verse.

It is true that, taken by themselves, the words "Ye are the salt of the earth" might encourage pride; but not if the meaning of the little parable be considered. The mysterious physical property in salt called "savour" in the English version belongs to it from the first. But when applied to human beings the figure suggests a sharp contrast. In those who were to be members of God's kingdom, the power to resist corruption was to be indicative of a life not physical but spiritual, not received at birth but imparted later. The human infant is born with instincts and desires which all tend to fashion it into conformity with its surroundings. The more it can adapt itself the more it fulfils its immediate desires of gaining pleasure. It thrives upon conformity, escaping pain.

¹ *Vide* Plummer on Luke xiv. 34, and Alford.

Such is the law of its physical life. But the spiritual life manifests itself in a contrary way as antagonistic to its surroundings, not by set purpose or with any ulterior aim, but by a "savour" of its own. And again, as always, we are reminded that the savour is a divine gift, the gift of God's own life promised later on by our Lord Himself, and imparted in due time by the Holy Spirit. There is nothing in this to minister to pride. Whether we consider the source of our power or the conflict which the exercise of it involves, a due perception of the lesson contained in the words, "Ye are the salt of the earth," must engender a spirit of humility and yet of thankfulness and hope.

As addressed to the future members of the society the words seem to be hardly applicable nowadays. Instead of a group of human beings distinguished from the surrounding mass of corruption, or of men in danger of corruption, we look forth on a church inextricably blended with the world, and exhibiting not only a languid power of renewal in many of her members, but often a state of advanced decay in herself, or, what is more suggestive of misgiving, a morbid activity in promoting purely mundane objects, relying on mundane means of strength, and adopting the conventional maxims of the day, not because they are true or improving, but simply because they are conventional, which fact is held to compensate for their lowness of tone and opposition to the teaching of our Lord. This is very true and very grievous, but it is well to remember that it makes no sort of difference to the deep truth that the divinely-founded society is the appointed means of rescuing the world from corruption ; and the more this idea of the collective responsibility for the inward vitality of the whole body is realised, the more it tends to be expressed in fact.

Lastly, it is most remarkable how the tone of the warning differs from that usually heard nowadays when similar topics are treated. Supposing any one finds himself in the position of being called to a work of a missionary kind, with a definite sphere of influence on which to act. By way of encouraging him, a good deal is generally said about the benefit he may confer on those with whom he comes into contact. And, conversely, if he grows apathetic, or timid, or conventional, we point to the sad deprivation of those who are hungering for the message which never comes. In that quarter we find material for our tragedy. Not so our Lord. In a few terribly graphic touches He portrays the woeful plight, not of surrounding society which has been left to decay, but of the unfaithful missionary himself, or rather of the community on whom the collective duty of arresting corruption by antagonism has been laid. Christ seems not to shrink from the danger of pressing the claims of self; the missionary community must think of its own vocation, the certainty of its doing its purifying work if only it be true to the purpose of its endowment; and it must also think of the utter tragedy of its own ruin if it lose sight of the meaning of its existence and the aim of its high calling, viz., the acting upon its surroundings in virtue of a savour of antagonism. It is not unlikely that there may be an exaggeration in the modern idea of avoiding everything egoistic in our appeals for spiritual work. It evidently is not enough to think only of the loss sustained by others if we fail. Christ, here as elsewhere, dwells on the piteous result to ourselves, not, indeed, of failure after honest effort, but of the dying away of something within us which was once full of life and promise.

III

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

v. 14-16

HERE we have a signal instance of the Lord's practice of using two parabolic images, one after another, for the sake of completeness in presenting a truth as vividly as possible. And we notice that the application of the figure of light requires for itself a double subordinate figure; that of a city set on a hill-top and a candle. The questions, therefore, which come up for solution are these: Why was that particular audience addressed in terms which at first seem to us far too flattering? And supposing for a moment that the reference is to the Pentecostal gift shortly to be bestowed, why is the present tense used—"ye are"? Thirdly, was there not danger of encouraging self-conceit in those who heard such words? (These three questions arise, of course, quite as naturally out of ver. 13.) Fourthly, what is the significance of the figure of a city; that is, would any other object set high up suit equally well for the comparison? Fifthly, does the exhortation to a certain kind of publicity in the Christian life apply to us now, or was it restricted to the time of the birth of the Church?

There is no way of explaining the use of such language as this to the particular audience in Palestine at that time, except on the assumption that they were shortly to become members of a Body which was to

be illuminated with a special gift of light, compared to which the remainder of the world was as darkness. There was nothing else to characterise them as being worthy of two such designations as "Salt of the Earth" and "Light of the World."

It is true that up to this time, as compared with other Semitic peoples, the Jewish nation had shown itself to possess a wonderful faculty of apprehending truths about God. Their contribution to mankind's knowledge has often been said to be a religious contribution, as distinct from that of the Greeks, which was artistic and philosophical, and that of the Romans, which was political and juristic. I would therefore explain the present tense as follows: For some centuries, ever since the early days when the Hebrew notions of Jehovah rose above those of the surrounding Semitic tribes, and when in the popular mind righteousness was definitely ascribed to the Deity, this gifted nation had begun to be potentially the Salt of the Earth and Light of the World. But up till now they had no mission to the outside world; rather it was their highest conception of public duty to keep themselves aloof, "to dwell apart" from the shocks and collisions of mighty racial forces like those of Assyria and Egypt, and develop in peaceful isolation and obscurity as the depository of the highest truths hitherto imparted to mankind about God.

But when Christ came all this was to be changed. The time had arrived when this endowment from on high was to act upon the surrounding peoples, and for isolation there must be substituted active intercourse and radiation of religious power and truth as from a centre.

This was a great change in the national ideal, and, as we know, the Jews failed to rise to the new conception. They imagined always that instead of their

being divinely empowered to renew and illuminate the Gentiles, there was still to be the "wall of partition" through which the only door was that of strict obedience to legal ordinances and inventions of men. But what our Lord meant was, that the time had come for the stage of self-development to pass into that of propagation or self-diffusion ; and whereas up till now the great test of national fidelity to God had been their separateness from the rest of mankind, in future it was to be in their loving contact with the Gentiles, and in their tranquil spreading of truths which had been gradually revealed to them alone.

It was a very great crisis in a nation's history. The passing on from self-development to the task of converting the world was beset with peculiar dangers. Christ reveals to His people the fact of their own peculiar endowment. Clearly this was to expose them to the danger of pride and a morbid self-consciousness. So we observe that in this most compressed and pithy saying no less than four cautions are given, which act as warnings against pride : (1) As already noticed, the endowment may be lost ; (2) The image of a city showed that the charge was given not to individuals but to an *organised group* ; (3) The influence was to be exercised not by a domineering or arrogant self-assertion, but by the peaceful action of an *implanted* grace. A city does not set itself on a hill, but "is set" by an outside power ; so a light does not kindle itself, but "is kindled," and then all that is necessary is that it should be severely true to its own nature, and, having been favourably placed, to shine. The image is a corrective of self-conceit. (4) The object is clearly stated : "That men may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." So that the hearers might feel dissatisfied

if they received glory ; such a result being an indication that the real object of the endowing of the human nature had failed. The greater the glory they receive, the less would God in heaven receive.

On the other hand, the positive injunction is equally definite : " You have the life and light ; don't be afraid of letting them both act." This is a command to men to be what they really are, and not to behave as if they were something else. It is part of our Lord's frequent and urgent warnings against hypocrisy, or acting a part, as distinguished from what we call naturalness. And if a difficulty is raised in connexion with the image of a city, viz. that as a city on a hill cannot be hid, the caution to the disciples is superfluous, the answer is simple enough. Our Lord does not say that the new society which He is founding can be successful in the attempt to escape notice, but that to make the attempt at all is wrong. If human beings receive a power, the very essence of which is self-diffusive, nothing but harm can come of it if the recipient aims at being self-centred, since men fail from underrating their own potential value no less than from overrating it.

The two parabolic sayings give with the most surprising clearness a noble and complete view of human life ; that of the individual belonging to a society which is divinely endowed, and charged with the duty of living serenely its natural life, though in presence of perpetual antagonism. The social character of the endowment is shown by the plural " Ye are," and by the use of the figure of a city. The fact of there being an *endowment* is brought out by the second figure, the lamp is lit ; that is, the group of the disciples is illuminated by a higher power, and then so placed in this life that self-diffusion becomes a necessity, unless they are false to their vocation. It would seem from

this that Christians ought to realise distinctly the fact of their being endowed, but at the same time to remember that the right use of the endowment is not with self-conscious strain, but the tranquil exercise of mainly unconscious influence. It is probable that men's best work is that which they know least about.

IV

CHRIST THE FULFILLER

v. 17-20.

AMONG the many questions which press for solution in connexion with this paragraph, one of the most interesting is the relation in which it stands to the preceding and the succeeding paragraphs. If this relation can be shown to be natural and in no way forced, we so far see reason to hold that the remainder of the chapter is not a detached fragment from some other discourse, but an integral portion of this Sermon. Before anything, however, can be said as to this difficult subject, it is to be noticed that the sense of the paragraph itself depends partly on the explanation given of the three words "for," v. 18; "therefore," v. 19; "for," v. 20. What, in short, is the main teaching of the paragraph itself?

"Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets." There is evidence to show that in Palestine all this time men looked forward to a Messiah who would play the part of a destroyer of the old Dispensation. Historically, of course, there is great interest in the accumulation of such evidence. But on the assumption that there is a message in the Sermon for all peoples and all time, we may generalise the statement by saying that men naturally are apprehensive concerning innovation lest it should take the form of destruction. A constructive genius is far more

difficult to anticipate, and requires a higher faculty to understand than a great destructive force, or, in other words, the programme of *revolution* is more intelligible than that of *evolution*. Now we observe that our Lord accepted the rôle of a Founder, which is in some sense of course that of an innovator, and in these verses it is clear that He wishes to lift the minds of His hearers to the conception of something constructive to be built on the old Dispensation without destroying it. It is not easy for us even now to make clear to ourselves how this was done; and at the time the words were spoken they must have presented an insoluble problem, almost insoluble even after vivid illustration was shed on them by the remainder of this chapter. It is necessary, therefore, to consider the meaning of the two words "destroy" and "fulfil" in ver. 17, and in particular their relation to the old Dispensation denoted by the words "law and prophets."

It is noticeable at once that Christ uses a word for "destroy" which seems to be merely an echo of some confused popular sayings about the Messiah. It is indeed not easy to state clearly what is meant by destroying a law or a set of laws, still less easy to say what would be the meaning of "destroying the prophets." Laws may no doubt be repealed, but it is not conceivable that any clear-headed man anticipated that the Messiah would repeal the Ten Commandments, or was going to forbid the Old Testament to be read. Strictly speaking, this is the only rational sense which attaches itself to the words; and I conceive that Christ was here merely putting on one side a rough popular description of the rôle which He was supposed to be going to play—a description which it is therefore needless for us to analyse.

The case, however, is quite different with the important word "fulfil." This word Christ chooses

Himself as an adequate description of His policy and aims. He says in effect, "My aim, not only in regard to the old Dispensation, but generally, is not to destroy but to fulfil," since we find the object is dropped after the two verbs in the second clause of the verse. Now we observe that through the rest of the paragraph the explanation is with regard not to Christ's attitude towards the whole of the Old Testament, but towards the law only: "commandments" is the expression used in v. 19. It will simplify our problem therefore if we first investigate the meaning of "fulfilling a law."

In ordinary conversation people take this to mean simply, "Do what the law says." But this is exactly the sense which our Lord excludes in the illustrations which follow. Hence the meaning is often supposed to be to "give a spiritual interpretation to an injunction or ordinance." This, however, is a vague sense, and unsatisfactory when applied to the expression "to fulfil the Scriptures," or "the saying," common in St. Matthew. In ii. 15, 18, two statements are quoted which apparently when spoken or written referred to the past: "A voice was heard," "Out of Egypt did I call;" and the Evangelist says that when subsequent events occurred "the saying was fulfilled." Part, anyhow, of his meaning must be that in his view the full meaning of events and of sayings descriptive of them remained unperceived by mankind till later experience revealed it. In the light of this later experience it was re-interpreted. The prophetic comment on some passing event is found to be full of import for subsequent history, and so gains, as the centuries pass, a new and richer sense, a wider application and significance. Perhaps this interpretation will help us in the more difficult phrase "to fulfil a law," and to clear up some difficult points

in vers. 18, 19, and 20. What is meant by no jot or tittle of the law passing away? and by the words "till all things become" or "come to pass," at the end of v. 18? and by the word "loosen" in v. 19? and what is the connexion with v. 20?

Our Lord's handling of such precepts as "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not commit adultery," has taught us for all time the difference between the spirit and the letter of a commandment. The function of a literal commandment or prohibition, as given to an individual or a nation, is to train the moral sense during a period of childhood; further, a time comes when the adolescent moral life is in danger of being throttled unless the literal precept gradually gives way to a more elastic and less restrictive law which is to guide it in its maturity. This is how the individual child is trained. And we observe that the prohibitions to be of any use in the earlier period must be fixed and rigid and literally obeyed. That is how their function is performed when the childish intelligence requires a concrete statement of duty and clearly-marked limits of action. But in proportion as there is a need of rigidity for the training of the nascent moral sense, so there is a need of elasticity and loosening when the moral sense enters on the adolescent stage. The function of conserving life first enforces literalism, then spirituality. As a rough illustration we may take the egg-shell, which shelters the young bird-life through its embryonic and infantine stage. How absolutely necessary it is that the shell be rigid and rounded off! Fostering of growth so far means confining; but there comes a time when this fostering will turn to choking and crushing unless rigidity gives way to relaxation. And we notice that a good description of this process is to call it a *loosening*.

Now we might say that there is a passing away of such a thing as an egg-shell, but it would be untrue to say that a prohibition which is necessary for the young child ever passes away, though the literal obedience to it may become a matter of indifference.¹ It is a method of helping to form a habit, first of outward action, then of mind and thought, which grows through the outward action till it becomes independent of it; but the inward and the outward are far too closely connected to allow of our saying that one passes away while the other remains. A seed does not "pass away" when the flower begins to spring up, but rather it is absorbed into a new form of life-energy. Hence we can understand how our Lord put aside some prevailing erroneous opinion when He declared that not a jot or tittle of the law should pass away. But let it be observed how immense is the difference between the enactments which we call the Ten Commandments and the rabbinical ordinances built up on them, or even the rules and prohibitions with which we strive to control the waywardness of childhood. Even a prohibition may be felt to be divine when it is found to abide through many changeful ages.

The expression in ver. 18, "Till all things be accomplished" (R.V.) is striking. It seems to point forward to the time when the world of "becoming" shall pass into that of "being." Possibly, too, if it may be taken as applying broadly to prophetic sayings as well as to "law," it may mean, "Till all events which illuminate the inspired sayings of the old Dis-

¹ It is interesting to observe that in the case of the Ten Commandments there is not one injunction which does not remain entirely and obviously valid under the new Dispensation, even the prohibition against "work" on the Sabbath, if Sabbath be changed to Sunday, and the idea of "work," as distinct from voluntary service, be retained.

pensation shall have come to pass." The expression clearly contains some meaning which is not found in the words, "Till heaven and earth pass away," or its insertion would be superfluous.

This being so, we may now pass to the difficult ver. 19. We have an idea of "loosening," and we want to know why it is combined with "teaching"; and further, how loosening and teaching is related to "doing and teaching"; and what is the emphasis on the word "least."

The aspect in which members of the kingdom are here regarded is that of helpers in a process of life. In other words, if we conceive of the literal precept stage as the earliest in the spiritual development, it is plain that a necessary though very humble service to that development is rendered by one who, at the right time, relaxes the pressure of the precept under the conviction that it is outgrown. He can do this in two ways—either by simply teaching others that the next stage in development has begun and that the precepts must now be spiritually obeyed, or by showing by practice and action that he is fulfilling the precept in a new way. The humbler service is to relax by teaching others; the harder and higher task being to act out the spiritual meaning of the law. (Notice here the strong claim of community life. Our Lord does not classify as a member of the kingdom at all one who only for himself relaxes the precept. Viewed socially, the humblest helper of the spiritual development is he who relaxes and teaches others to see the meaning of the relaxation.) And if the precept which is thus relaxed, and by relaxation is absorbed into the next stage of development, be "one of the least of these commandments," clearly such a loosener is entitled to the "least" position "in the kingdom." Far higher we feel to be the achievement of one who

teaches the meaning of the change by the compelling grandeur of his own life and conduct. ("Do and teach"; not in the reverse order, "Practise what he preaches," which would be irrelevant here.) The glory of teaching is in affirmation and construction; but in the history of progress there is seen to be a place for the humble denier, the destructive critic, the iconoclast-teacher, the loosener of men's allegiance to outworn ideals; and our Lord allows us to perceive the almost infinite distance between this and His own supreme affirmation of spiritual progress both by precept and example. He was a loosener indeed, but wholly without violence, and a builder of a new spiritual building which can stand against all the shocks of time—the fabric of a society gradually growing, through understanding of His life and participation in it, into the perfection of spiritual obedience.

In this development there are the following stages : (1) Blind subservience to narrow precepts of conduct (the number of which the Jewish teachers continually augmented); (2) the loosener able to see that this stage was inadequate; (3) and to explain why; (4) able to act out the spiritual underlying principle; (5) and by teaching as well as example to lead others to do the same. Evolution is a higher thing than revolution, but revolution is often better than stagnation.

Ver. 20 : "Unless your righteousness shall exceed . . ." The word translated "exceed" is not easy to render with precision when it is combined with another word meaning "more than." It probably means "be abundant," or "overflow" more than that of the scribes and Pharisees; and this again should not be taken to imply that the righteousness of the latter overflowed or was abundant, but rather that the righteousness of Christ's hearers was

to overflow so as to exceed, implying that the righteousness which was exhibited by the scribes and Pharisees was of the sort that was restricted within limits, and that the righteousness which was to be that of the new kingdom was to be of an unrestricted nature, overflowing its limits. The importance of this translation is evident. If the injunction was, as might be inferred from the Revised Version, simply that His hearers were to be more righteous than the Pharisees, *and in their way*, then indeed the burden of Judaism was being laid more heavily on their necks than ever before. Obedience to a strict and growing code of rules, and an idea that having fulfilled this more completely than others constituted a title to self-congratulation and to the praise of men—these seem to be leading features of the Pharisaic character. Now our Lord on several occasions warned His disciples most emphatically against all these characteristics. They were cautioned against the idea that they could ever suppose they had done enough, and with no less urgency He bids them beware of the love of praise. Thus here it is reasonable to take the words as indicating a leading feature of the Christian character—that its righteousness is unrestricted by any limits. It grows and grows, and yet is ever dissatisfied with itself, and ever recoils from the praise of men, as though such praise implied that a limit had been reached beyond which it was not to be expected that men need go. More will be said on this point when we come to the solemn words, “Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.” Meantime we cannot be wrong in supposing that the entry into the kingdom is defined to be at the point where stagnation merges into discontent, or where the efforts after the ideal goodness *overflow*, as refusing to be bound by the letter of an enactment. And in the

case of the Pharisees there was another limit within which their "righteousness" was confined—the limit of self. They were zealous after a certain ideal of virtue which was highly rated at the time ; but they had no conception of social service such as Christ declared in v. 19 ("And teach men so") to be indispensable. In our day it is quite easy to vary the outward form of virtue, or righteousness, or respectability, and yet to leave the canker at the root. Men may easily be eager after social service, but if it is for selfish ends it is Pharisaism in modern dress. The righteousness of Christ's kingdom is to be unshackled by any enactments, though in its training it may be guided by them ; but still more necessary is it that it should "abound" so as to overflow the claims of self. Pharisaic virtue must have been like a cold, still, stagnant pool ; the righteousness of the Christian recalls the bubbling spring which, welling out from unseen depths, overflows its hollow bed, and courses onwards and outwards to give life wherever it runs.

The paragraph may now be summarised so as to show the connexions of the verses. Christ had just told His disciples to let their good works be seen by others. But at this point a question must naturally arise—of what nature were the good works to be ? Were they to be based on the legal statutes ? But, if so, how were they to differ from the painstaking displays of virtue given by the scribes and Pharisees ? And, again, was not the new Messiah to be a destroyer of the law and the prophets ? So the Teacher lays down the great truth that the precepts of the law were not to be destroyed because He was not come as a destroyer but as a fulfiller ; as One who was not to annihilate the early Dispensation, but to lift it on into its next and last stage. For the law will not be annihilated in any single enactment, but transformed, and it will

not be thought of as having passed away till all future events destined to bring out its meaning shall have come to pass. Its interpretation will itself have a history, the history of a development; and the first requisite in that development is that the literal rigidity rightly characteristic of the first stage should be relaxed. This relaxation must be effected by working on men's minds, either by simple teaching or by the suasive force of a life lived among them. Of these two ways the second is by far the greater, but the first, even if it is carried out with regard to the least important enactment, will give him who achieves it the passport to My kingdom. For membership in that kingdom is only given to those who serve others; and so your righteousness is to be different in kind from the legal righteousness which you know—that is fettered by selfishness and is not intended to pass a certain limit of effort, determined by conventional standards; yours is to be unshackled by rules, unselfish, and rich in the spirit of social service; and when your righteousness begins to exhibit these qualities, then entry into the kingdom is yours.

V

“THOU SHALT NOT KILL”

v. 21-24

IT has often been noticed with what supreme authority Christ sets Himself above Moses in this personal restatement of the law; in each instance beginning with “But I say unto you.” The advancing of such claims must have seemed to “the narrow horizon of contemporary Judaism”¹ simply blasphemous; and was probably one of the elements in Christ’s teaching which led to His death. Thus early in His ministry does He make a strong demand on the faith of His hearers. They must have been fairly astonished at the royal tone adopted by One so lowly in station, whom they knew as a dweller in their own land. But the offence was largely mitigated by the delight of hearing topics of profound interest handled with masterly power and freshness. St. Chrysostom² also draws attention to the significance of the term “it was said,” viz., that the full statement of the truth would have been more than His hearers could have borne. If the words had been “God said to them of old” or “I said,” then the attention of the Galileans would have been drawn off into wondering how the Divine utterances can ever need modifying or restating. In modern times the truth

¹ Dalman.

² Quoted by Alford.

of the economy of revelation has only been slowly and painfully learnt, and the exact object of our Lord's teaching at this minute was to state with the utmost emphasis the difference between the outward action which violates the letter of a prohibition and the inward thoughts which violate it in spirit. He thus spares His hearers by lightly passing over a difficult question connected with the past by fixing their attention on the present.

But a clear distinction must be drawn between the mere thoughts of the heart, and the conduct which our Lord here condemns. In the triple statement under consideration we notice that in the first only is it a question of a bare thought; the other two illustrations refer to spoken words. It is true that both speech and thought were ignored by the rabbis of the time, who concentrated their attention mainly on outward conduct. But for us the distinction is important. Christ warns against the feeling of anger; then against two spoken expressions of anger and contempt. Normally with us a feeling is intensified and prepared for action by being put into words, words being the intermediate stage between thought and action, and though in civilised life we often stop short of the third stage, yet we all know that the mere using of words to formulate an emotion of hostility is like undergoing an access of the emotion. Very often we utter our feelings of this sort in order to gain countenance for them, and so without understanding what we are doing we are trying to expose our interlocutor to the same temptation, and, in short, to make him partner in the same sin. These, however, are not exactly the cases referred to in the text. We are dealing here simply with the utterance of hostile feelings directed straight against the object of them.

And if guilt deepens as feelings are expressed, it deepens also as anger is expressed in terms of *scorn*. Both the words which appear in our Bible respectively as "Raca" and "Thou fool" are terms of scorn, combining probably the expression of wrath with that of self-exaltation, this last fact being the explanation of the additional guilt incurred; that is, if anger takes on the feeling of contempt, it becomes enmity without the least ingredient of love, but manifesting itself under self-complacency. Scorn implies a comparison between self and another; and, moreover, the result of the comparison fosters the idea that reconciliation is not worth while, thus justifying what is really a mere succumbing to thoughtless wrath.

But as we read these verses we cannot help asking how far are we to take literally the words of condemnation, and why is the warning couched in this peculiar form, "the judgment—the council—the hell of fire." This last question has been amply explained by commentators. A reference to 2 Chron. xix. 5 shows how Jehosaphat "appointed a central court in Jerusalem and local courts in all the towns." The former is alluded to in this passage under the term "council," the latter are called "the judgment." It seems that a minor offence was tried by the local courts, a more serious one by the central Sanhedrim, and the most serious of all were punished by a special decree under which the corpse was flung out into the valley of Hinnom, where offal and refuse were burnt. It is, however, difficult to be certain, first, whether there was a gradation of offences observed in Jewish usages by the employment of one court or the other; secondly, whether, assuming this to be so, we should be right in graduating the sins spoken of by our Lord on a scale of increasing guiltiness. It would add considerably to the clearness of this solemn passage

if, for instance, we could definitely ascertain that the sin denoted by the use of the term “Raca” were less heinous than that alluded to by the expression “thou fool”; but it is just here where a more thorough archaeological knowledge is required than we are able to command. A very probable estimate, however, of the two spoken words points to something like a scale of increasing bitterness in the feelings which find expression. First, the continuous feeling of wrath, “he that is angry”; then the scornful word “Raca”; then the word of utter abhorrence, not at all equal to “thou fool,” but, according to an ancient authority, “thou godless one.” According to this, which may be correct, but which cannot be regarded as certain, man’s evil temper towards his brother may either be simply wrathful, that is, containing the desire to do him an injury, or contemptuous and careless of concealing the contempt, or bitterly scornful to the point of loathing. Of course, the main point in the teaching is that any one of these three states of feeling are as guilty as the outward act of homicide, because they differ from homicide only in the fact that the opportunity is wanting, as is the case, for instance, when hatred cannot safely proceed to violence in a civilised community.

A further significance, however, is given to the image by the fact that the penalty of death belongs to the jurisdiction of the tribunals referred to. The local courts could put to death with the sword, the Sanhedrim by stoning, and in aggravated cases the utter ignominy of the Hinnom valley was added. We have therefore indications, first, that the sin of enmity of feeling against a “brother” is treated by our Lord as a sin of the utmost gravity; secondly, that there is a gradation in the sins mentioned; proof of this latter being (*a*) undoubted progress in guilt between an

angry thought and an angry word, and (b) the obvious increase in the gravity of the punishment. Whatever exact meaning therefore may belong to the word translated "fool," it differs for the worse from Raca, probably expressing malevolence and loathing as well as contempt.

Perhaps in no single respect does our conduct fall so grievously short of the true Christian standard as in this matter of silent hostility that is nursed and of scorn that is uttered. We have to consider the tremendous emphasis of these words in conjunction with the startling clause in the Lord's Prayer, "As we forgive those that trespass against us," and the unique severity of the parable of the Unmerciful Servant. We have then to remember how much of ordinary conversation consists of expressions of disdain; how our desire for being amused is stimulated in this way; and, further, that it is not uncommon for the actual words, "I hate so and so," to be used; and it can hardly be denied that such talk is symptomatic of a profound revolt against the teaching of Christ when it goes strongly against our natural temper. The awfulness of the warning is not to be disguised. And it is necessary for us to be on our guard against a hasty conclusion that the inward thoughts are everything and the outward expression nothing. There is a clear distinction drawn between bad thoughts uttered and not uttered, and there is evidently a peculiar guilt attaching to bad *words* apart from the thoughts from which they rise. For it should be remembered in this connexion that the solemn warning against blasphemy, against the Holy Ghost, is a warning about something *uttered*.

We have here a noteworthy instance of balance in Christ's teaching. There were two great dangers which beset any ethical or spiritual instruction

addressed to the Jews in the days when Christianity was founded. The first was that the words would be taken literally, and an outward obedience substituted for the living, spontaneous service demanded of the children of our Heavenly Father. To avoid this, Jesus couched His precepts in language of the most telling and arresting vividness, which was the outcome of His peculiar method of avoiding qualifications, of saying one thing at a time and fixing the whole attention of His hearers on the single point which He wanted to emphasise. This has often been remarked, but it is clear that while this method avoided the danger of encouraging a slavish conformity to outward precepts, it threatened the opposite peril of onesidedness and lack of large consideration of the manifold facts of life, just as we often notice clearness of expression obviously due to narrowness of vision. Now in the passage before us it was evidently Christ's object to emphasise the grand importance of thoughts and feelings as distinguished from their mere manifestation in outward act. But yet He never loses sight of the fact that words, the outward expression of inner feeling, do, when spoken, affect and intensify those feelings, and that the sin of wrathful emotion indulged against a fellow-creature is made worse by the utterance of the emotion ; and so the two sides of the truth are presented in perfect balance, though on first reading the Lord seems to be bringing out only one. It is perhaps hardly reverent to use expressions of admiration of the skill shown in this ; but where can one find elsewhere such a blend of commanding power, skill, delicacy, and insight, shown in ethical instruction, which, while it is both deep and comprehensive, is a model of popular exposition ?

VI

THE GIFT BEFORE THE ALTAR

v. 22

THERE can be no doubt about the central injunction contained in this verse. It is that under certain conditions a duty towards a "brother" is so urgent that it must be allowed to take precedence of a duty towards God ; the only thing to avoid is delay. But what are the conditions referred to, and what is the exact nature of the obligation ? It is when a man remembers that his "brother hath aught against him," some grievance ; and nothing is said to imply that the grievance must be well founded. It may be a matter of fancy or unreasonable pique ; none the less the first duty when the facts are remembered is to be reconciled with all possible speed.

The striking turn given to the sentence is contained in the expression "hath aught against thee," which alters the injunction from what would have been expected ; "if thou hast done any injury to thy brother, go and ask his pardon." The question here is simply what is the brother thinking and feeling about the person addressed, who is engaged in the solemn task of offering a sacrifice on God's altar ? and the words at once suggest a more exacting view of the duty of brotherly love. No Christian nowadays would dispute the obligation to ask for pardon

after doing an injury ; but many would feel it quite unimportant to be reconciled to one who is merely cherishing a fancied grievance. Indeed, it is often supposed, or anyhow said, that the wisest and most dignified way of treating such a case is to leave it alone. The veriest worldling would recognise that reprisals or heated rejoinders are contrary to the principles which he professes, however ready he may be to excuse such conduct. But for one Christian to treat the protests and injured tone of another with calm silence is often held to be a proof of self-mastery ; "it is gentleman-like ; and while it forbears to wound, it is consistent with a proper pride." But how remote from the spirit of Christ's command ! It is to be feared that a regard for our dignity is made the excuse for much disobedience to our Master. The picture which He draws of one member of His kingdom suddenly interrupting his worship of God just at its most critical, most sacred stage, because he remembers that a brother has a grievance against him, need not be pressed in every literal detail any more than other half-parabolic sayings in the great Sermon. But none the less the main teaching of it is clearly expressed. When there is a breach between one Christian and another, no matter on whose side the fault lies, or whether the soreness of one man be due to the delusions of conceit, then no regard for personal dignity or the decorums of religious routine (and yet our Lord held these in high reverence), must delay for one moment the reconciliation which is perhaps not earnestly wished for by either party, but is nevertheless straightly commanded by Christ. The brother's feeling of soreness may be foolish, none the less it must be allayed.

The truth is that this injunction connects itself with the preceding words concerning *contempt*. A

dignified ignoring of our neighbour's grievance against us is a contemptuous course of conduct, totally at variance with the law of love. It implies to others what is very often said, that it is no matter to us what our brother feels or thinks about us ; we can afford to despise it.¹ And in this is involved a comparison between ourselves and our neighbour which issues, as comparisons frequently do, in self-exaltation. The Saviour's words are directed against any such feeling. They enjoin a course of conduct which must be the outcome of a sincere conviction that the feelings of our neighbour towards ourselves—not merely like and dislike, but grievance or soreness on account of injury, real or supposed—is all important ; so much so that the healing of the soreness is to be regarded as a duty taking precedence even of an act of worship due to God.²

Two questions arise at this point. On what principle is the injunction based ? In other words, how are we to feel sure that the duty is really of primacy among other duties ? When we consider the urgent demands upon us of all kinds of social need, the poverty, affliction, distress of mind which call for our help, and require much thought and energy and self-sacrifice, or the claims of patriotism, or of private study, of literature, science, art, or the duty of private and public prayer, and of spreading the Word of God, then it is hard not to feel a misgiving that the duty of reconciliation with our neighbour may be over-pressed in ethical teaching. Is there not something unprac-

¹ In international relations it is said that England is unpopular with other nations because she cares so little to try to make her policy clear to them by subsidising a foreign newspaper.

² Not that this particular detail is given us for imitation. There is an implied rebuke for the duty having been forgotten till so late (Stier).

tical about it? Especially if the neighbour is the victim of a hallucination, are we to forego other very urgent claims in order to satisfy him that he has not been ill-used after all? We fail to see the obligation in that it does not appear that the neglect of this duty for some other of more practical importance would make serious difference to anybody.

And, again, it is difficult to understand why this or any other duty towards our fellow-men should take precedence of our duty towards God. It has often been pointed out that the Scripture view of the heinousness of sin depends on the degree in which any particular act or feeling derogates from the honour due to God. We need only mention the offence of Moses, of Saul, and of Ahab in the Old Testament.¹ And in the Gospel story what more signal instance could be given than the prominence given to St. Peter's denial? or the comment of that apostle on the sin of Ananias? But in the passage before us we seem to find the order of things reversed. It is a question of one of two duties, the one a rendering of honour to God in the highest act of worship, the other the making of an effort to soothe the susceptibilities—possibly foolish—of a neighbour. And our Lord decides emphatically in favour of the latter. It should further be remembered that of all attempts which we make in ordinary life, none fail more often than attempts at reconciliation. How often they are completely misunderstood! and in such cases is not more harm done than good? And even when

¹ Should it be felt that in some of these cases criticism, by altering our view of the dates of the narrative, has weakened the force of this generalisation, it may still be said that even if the truth of the history be suspected, we have to take into account the *idea* embodied in the narrative as handed down.

they succeed, the success is often very partial, and always costs a great deal of time and trouble. Finally, says the practical man, when all is done, is any one really the better?

Thus the two questions are closely connected. The answer will depend on the view we take of our duty to our neighbour as being really and simply the consequence of our relation to God. Our Lord says elsewhere, "The second (commandment) is like unto it (the first): Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." But if we strive to make clear to ourselves wherein exactly this likeness exists, we shall find that while its existence as a fact is testified to by those who have the best right to speak, yet it is not to be analysed or defined. Yet we can understand its nature when we picture to ourselves an ideal family life, wherein the love of the father for the children and by the children is all-pervading, so that each child, learning gradually the intensity of the father's feeling for each of his brothers, finds it impossible not to regard that brother with something of the same love. But he would not be able to explain why he should love him.¹ And, moreover, he would feel that if he could explain the reason, nothing would be gained, indeed the mere attempt to construe his feeling as rational would impair its power. The moment we fancy that we have found a reason for loving our neighbour, the reason begins to shrivel and vanish. It refuses to remain as a motive of action. Hence the idea that friendly conduct towards our neighbour conduces to the

¹ Cf. for instance, Sidgwick's "Methods of Ethics." Such a book is to readers, in a certain stage of development, most depressing. But later they may come to feel that there is something encouraging in the very barrenness of its conclusions. If the principles of conduct could be rationalised, they would not satisfy.

general happiness, to our own and that of others, may be, and doubtless is, an unassailable truth, but it is strangely weak as a basis of conduct. The more clearly it is discerned and the more positively it is maintained, the feebler is its appeal ; and no matter how it is stated, it is vitiated by something of selfishness in its very central principle. But, in fact, the only basis of this friendly, brotherly conduct towards our fellow-men which will, so to speak, stand wear and tear, is to be found in something infinite, the love, namely, which God bears to man. "We love Him because He first loved us," gives the history of Christian motive revealed as in a spiritual drama. Man answers to that love ; and his response God-ward, in so far as it is genuine and the outcome of single-mindedness, is bound to take on the further characteristic of love to other men. And so close is the interdependence of the two relations that we find the one feeling inevitably suffers when the other is weakened. In a hundred subtle ways our considerateness for others depends for its true vitality on an ever-springing fountain of love to God deep within the soul.

Evidently this truth bears in a practical way on much of Christian life, but it must not be considered further here. We have to notice how our Lord pre-supposes some infinitely deep motive in this saying, for direct honour paid to God Himself is here supposed to give way to the claims of brotherhood. This must be because something is at stake far deeper than the *mere* relation of man with man ; and this we know to be our love towards God, which in its turn rests on His love for us.

This perhaps indicates the answer to the question of precedence. It is perfectly true that honour due

to God is habitually given the priority before our duty to others ; that the glory of God comes first, the good of men second. But there is in reality no contradiction of this principle in the sentence before us. Reconciliation with an offended brother is not only a re-establishment of pleasant and comfortable relations tending to smooth the path of life ; it is the saving of two souls, a matter with which the honour of God is vitally connected. We may also perceive how easily we lose the sense of proportion in spiritual questions of this kind. It is a fact that reconciliation succeeding to estrangement does add to the happiness of life to a remarkable degree. And so we languidly acquiesce in Christ's teaching, hoping that others anyhow will follow it ; but we disregard the soul-searching severity of the words, and still more easily the fact that they are based entirely on sanctions, motives, hopes, and fears which are not of this world. God's "tender love towards mankind" is revealed in the happiness which, in a general way, follows the establishment of a right relation with our fellow-men. But if we make that happiness the motive for the restoration of an impaired relation, we sully our aspirations with the taint of selfishness, and deprive our endeavours of their only enduring motive and mainspring—the love of God.

But our Lord guards the proportion of the two ideas of the duty to God and to our neighbour by the striking command inserted at the end of the parabolic statement, "and then go and offer thy gift." This clause gives us a right to say that the teaching is concerned not primarily with our duty to our neighbour, but with the conditions necessary to true service of God. Christ would have us strain every nerve to maintain the brotherly

relation to others, because unless it is maintained our offering to God, of whatever kind this may be, is rendered useless. Hence we must not conclude that, after the great effort has been made, and the friendliness re-established, our duty is at an end; we have now to resume the main purpose of life, since the fatal interruption to it has been removed.

The simplest and perhaps the truest application of this great principle is seen in the matter of thanksgiving. It constantly happens that by God's grace men are enabled, when assaulted by the powers of evil, to prevail. Some signal victory over pride has been gained. But the most important part of the whole duty still remains—that is, the offering of a heartfelt thanksgiving. This most essential claim upon us, so widely and so fatally ignored, is the grand safeguard against a danger more subtle and deadly even than those connected with resentment and pride—the danger of supposing that the conquest has been simply our own doing. For such is virtually the inference drawn by every one who feels no call to pay the offering of thanksgiving to God when a moral and spiritual crisis is past. Trainers of the young have a very grave responsibility here. It is exceedingly easy to rest quite contented with having guided "one of these little ones" through a moral crisis, as if good conduct were all that Christ requires. When this happens, he is powerfully induced to conceive of a spiritual miracle, his own recovery from sin, as a sign of his own strength and a result of his own goodness, or of some human agency. The golden opportunity of recognising God's handiwork in the moral experience has been presented, and maybe for the last

time in his life ; if it is not taken, a deep delusion will grow up in the soul, and the estrangement from God may be increased though the conduct may improve. The conquest should be a preliminary to the one paramount and pervading claim—the offering of thanksgiving to God.

VII

“AGREE WITH THINE ADVERSARY QUICKLY”

v. 25, 26

As commonly quoted this injunction is a piece of worldly wisdom. In St. Augustine's time there were commentators who so explained it, but he despairs even to notice their interpretation.¹ The context indeed entirely forbids it. But when we come to look closely into the words formidable difficulties appear.

“In the way with him.” Ordinarily this phrase is taken as referring to the Roman practice of the prosecutor and defendant proceeding together to the law court, during which brief interval there would be a chance of their coming to terms. The Greek, however, cannot mean this. The phrase translated “agree” means “be kindly disposed in feeling,” and has somehow to be combined with the adverb “quickly.” This fact has been strangely overlooked.² But it throws the literal interpretation of the parabolic simile into confusion. If “adversary” be taken to mean the human adversary with whom there has been a quarrel, the difference in the feelings of A would not necessarily affect the behaviour of B, the

¹ Trench, “St. Augustine on the Sermon,” p. 201.

² e.g. by St. Chrysostom, St. Augustine, Stier, Trench, and Alford.

adversary, unless it took the form of some outward overture. "Deliver thee to the judge,"¹ apparently denotes the suit beginning. How can this be prevented if the debt is not paid, as is certainly implied by the end of verse 26? And when we come to consider the spiritual application of this phrase, and assume that God is represented by the Judge, it is doubtful if any process can be conceived of which is faithfully denoted by the words.²

These questions are sufficient to show how little our Lord cared for the precise correspondence between the outward setting and the inward truth signified. It is still not uncommon to find expositors of Scripture sorely hampered by the supposed necessity of assuming this correspondence in the case of the parables in the Gospel, whereas it is wiser, in spite of the fact that in one case our Lord indicated it Himself, to proceed on a very different principle of interpretation. It is to observe that Christ breaks the correspondence freely and often, but that whenever He does we are bound to believe that it was done designedly to bring out into clear prominence some moral or religious truth, else we are bound to attribute it simply to want of skill, which is out of the question.

Without aiming, then, at precision in these details, we may note that the outward picture suggests an "inward and spiritual" truth, not by correspondence in details, but in virtue of its general tone. The grim picture of the debtor being

¹ Translated by Wycliffe, "masterful axer."

² Trench speaks of this difficulty as "easy of dilution," and, granted that the figure has to be applied, his suggestion (p. 204) is less violent than others.

“delivered over” to the judge first, then to the “executioner,”¹ then into prison; what principle does it illustrate? The answer clearly is, the *inexorable* character of human law. When once the machinery is set in motion, it cannot be stopped till the final catastrophe is reached. This is the underlying principle on the one side. On the other, there is the inference, that before all things in this matter of dealing with an adversary, delay is not to be thought of. But in doing what? We have no word answering to the “Be reconciled” of ver. 24. What is meant by “Be kindly disposed, quickly”? If the words are to make good sense as they stand, some idea of beginning to change the mind must be imported into them. They certainly contain no such idea in the original Greek, and we can only soften the difficulty slightly by some such paraphrase as this: “There must be no delay in entering on a permanent state of kindly feeling towards thine adversary.” It may be imagined that Christ here spoke colloquially, throwing in the word “quickly,” though it is in reality ungrammatical, as a vivid interpolation which was faithfully rendered from the Aramaic into Greek.

The picture is now very distinctly coloured to remind the hearers of the certainty of the course of law. But an attempt to make the separate items correspond with facts of the spiritual world is barred by this further consideration. The parable requires that the adversary shall be in the right. But as regards the duty of forbearance which is being inculcated, the assumption seems to be different. A case is suggested when the adversary or brother “hath ought against thee”—when the duty of

¹ Even in this instance, that of the Sower, the correspondence only holds to a certain point. Cf. also the Unjust Steward.

reconciliation is just as imperative if the grievance be groundless. Hence it is not safe to go further than to point out the weighty and forcible emphasis on the *urgency* of this duty of setting the heart right towards any one from whom we are estranged. And, whereas the parable would require that some open overture towards reconciliation be made, our Lord discards this detail and emphasises the need of kindly feeling, thus clearly illustrating a great spiritual truth. The inner feeling may be useless for the adversary, but it is all-important in view of the divine Judge.

It is well to notice that this last point, blurred by the English translation "agree," is of use for practical guidance. Not unfrequently one hears of the difficulty in a quarrel of knowing *what to do* to show forgiveness. Our Lord treats the outward manifestation of good feeling as of less importance than the good feeling itself. How strangely we ignore this in our ordinary life! It is, like all the injunctions in the great Sermon, profoundly simple and profoundly difficult to carry out, because it is purely spiritual. Men will go through a good deal of exertion to perform a necessary outward action, but when the command is for a feeling such as plainly requires spiritual help for us to gain, we are apt to ignore the claim as being too exacting. Once more we see an illustration of the way in which the moral commands of the Christian religion can only be seriously considered as within the horizon of practical conduct, if they are accompanied by some promise or guarantee of spiritual renewal. Our natural answer to an injunction concerning *feelings* is that they are and must be beyond our control. We admit that the expression of them must be checked; but though this admission in reality postu-

lates an infusion of strength into our being from some higher source, yet we arbitrarily draw the line at the outward manifestation. The truth is that both in the one case and the other experience shows us our own impotence, but in the spiritual region that impotence is most evidently a fact. Christ, however, here as elsewhere, assumes that it is somehow to be got over. The simplest explanation is that He had in mind the gift of the Comforter or Strenghtener, through whose aid these glorious moral principles were to be translated into action.

The picture of the course taken by human law forces upon our attention the truth that, in regard to our duty towards an "adversary," there is a time-limit beyond which the duty cannot be postponed. The fact corresponding to this is death, and the solemn hint is conveyed that after death we shall no longer be under probation, this being strictly in conformity to the teaching of Scripture.¹ Thus we may further paraphrase the words, "Make it a habit to be continuously and always well-disposed to your adversary ; and if you have not begun to school your feelings in this way, yet begin at once. There is no time to lose ; death is coming, and, after death, the judgment." So "in the way with him" may be taken simply "as long as this is possible for you" ; but it is always possible, if the command be taken simply as applying to the feelings without reference to actual overtures for reconciliation ; and this interpretation will not be disturbed by the practical difficulties which often occur in the way of reconciliation, such as the severance of the two parties, or the inaccessibility of one of them owing to other causes. Thus "in the way" may almost be taken as "in the

¹ *Vide* Gayford, "The Future State." Oxford Church Text-Books chap. iii.

pilgrimage of life"; but it is perhaps preferable to conceive of the expression as the point in the saying where the parabolic figure intrudes itself, and this figure holds its ground till the end, when, as we shall see, it is partly displaced by the urgency of the spiritual application. If this be conceded, then there is no necessity for seeking a spiritual significance for the expressions "deliver thee to," nor "the judge," nor "the officer," nor "the prison." These will be held to have been inserted simply for the sake of greater vividness, and marvellously they succeed in their object, if only the analytical interpretation be not pushed too far.

"Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing." This is a terrific saying; but it is to be noticed that its terror depends largely on whether Christ went out of His way, so to speak, in introducing it, or was merely describing an ordinary usage of Roman law.¹ If the latter, then the meaning would be, "You know that imprisonment for debt under Roman law lasts until full payment is made; in other words, is often perpetual. This is the normal issue of the process which begins with the adversary haling the debtor before the judge in mundane affairs. In the spiritual kingdom the law will similarly take its course on to the end." But clearly there is no affirmation here of what the end in the latter case—the spiritual—will be. Now if, on the other hand, there was no such practice in Roman law in Palestine, then Christ once more abruptly quits the outward figure in order to enunciate a spiritual truth which

¹ Certainly not Jewish law, which, as regards punishment for debt, was very lenient. (*Vide* Edersheim's "Sketches of Jewish Social Life," p. 212. On p. 56 there is a very interesting sketch of the system of farming out the taxes by the Equites, who were also judges.)

otherwise would be blurred or omitted altogether ; and, awful though this conclusion is, it is rendered probable by the introductory word Amen = Verily. Such an arresting word in the middle of a description of commonplace fact would be entirely out of place. Nor is there evidence to show that in Palestine at that time the Jews could have become acquainted with any such procedure as an imprisonment for debt till the debt was paid. Everything goes to show that in our Lord's parabolic sayings the spiritual meaning is always close to the surface, and easily breaks through the crust of imagery with which it is partly veiled. The figures are chosen with perfect freedom, sometimes altered, sometimes omitted ; occasionally, as here, so expressed that they seem to be giving only the outward picture, till on a sudden the naked spiritual truth shoots forth with scarcely a word of metaphor to palliate its soul-searching severity. It is not possible to imagine any form of teaching better adapted to arrest attention, live in the memory, and penetrate the hard shell of man's indifference with the message of the issues of life, death, and judgment to come.

VIII

THE LAW OF ADULTERY

v. 27, 28

THE impression that many readers and hearers of these verses take away is that our Lord here states a sin of thought to be as bad as one of action. It is quite true that this is involved in the saying, but, accurately speaking, it is a condemnation of an act, not of a thought. Looking is an act ; and the reason why it is condemned is that it is done with a certain purpose, viz. to inflame a natural desire. When once that act has been committed with this intention of kindling a certain desire, then the sin is in reality the same as if the desire had been gratified by a criminal act.

We should be careful to notice that here is no question whatever of a thought being condemned for the practical reason that it is likely to lead to action. "He hath *already* (or "there and then") committed adultery." These words obviously mean that, in point of guiltiness, when once the process in the human mind has gone on to the point that a desire for what is unlawful has been voluntarily and successfully inflamed, then the act which gratifies the desire adds nothing to the sin. So that it is completely irrelevant to point out, as is often done, by way of warning to others, that thoughts sooner or later lead to action. Such axioms have their use in

a different context (James i. 16), but as explanations of this text are misleading.

Nor again is the simple desire condemned. The desire for sexual union is a natural desire, and a great deal of false and mischievous sentiment has grown from the failure to recognise quite clearly this fact. But when we say that it is a natural desire, we have by no means exhausted the subject ; rather we have only begun to state a problem of conduct, for the question at once arises, in what way are we to treat this and other desires ? Are they to be repressed, or stimulated, or ignored, or gratified without being stimulated ? and so on. There are clearly many questions that might be put. Here our Lord only deals directly with one. The needless and intentional stimulation of such desires, or, anyhow, of this particular desire, is condemned as on a par with the direct violation of one of the Ten Commandments.

But it may be said that the epithet "natural" is misplaced. Is not our Lord dealing with the subject of a breach of the matrimonial law, and so the desire that is here condemned is a desire for a criminal gratification ? This we believe to be erroneous. The Jewish law dealt only with the breach of the marriage bond, and "Thou shalt not commit adultery" meant a prohibition of union between any married man and any woman other than his wife, also between any married woman and any man other than her husband. Christ lays down that this prohibition is vastly too narrow for the members of the new kingdom. They, as men, are faced with a problem of special urgency. In the course of passing from childhood to manhood they become conscious of desires naturally growing in them, with the implanting of which they have had nothing to do. These desires press with imperious force for gratification, but if wisely

guided and trained by an instructed will may inspire feelings of wholesome chivalry towards the other sex ; if not, they may crave for unlawful satisfaction. That is the position with which Christ deals, and according to His usual practice of selecting one definite fact as an illustration of a law, He sternly condemns one method of treating these desires, viz., the intentional excitement of them by the use of the eye. This is indeed a wonderful and most striking expansion of the Jewish law, and lays down a principle which, when properly understood, is of capital importance in regard to many questions of conduct. A little knowledge of our Lord's methods of teaching gives us the conviction, that whereas the principle appears to be confined to one set of individuals, we are justified in extending it far and wide. The text speaks of men only ; we apply it to women, and we ought to apply it to boys and girls. Moreover, instead of one desire it includes all desires common to humanity which are not to be treated as sinful in themselves, nor to be ignored, nor suppressed, but curbed and guided, and in any case never to be needlessly excited.¹

¹ It may be objected that this treatment of the subject is too general, and that in the text the prohibition is only directed against desire inflamed towards a particular individual. This opens up the question what individual is meant, and we are cautioned by Matthäi (Stier, p. 128) that, with a view to marriage, looking and desiring are inevitable and justifiable. But the whole question of what woman is meant by the unarticulated word *γυναικα* is superfluous if we clearly recognise that the instance given is to illustrate a wide principle ; and even so the words *πᾶς δ* and *γυναικα* set forth the command in as broad a fashion as can well be. It is true that Christ is not dealing here with the exact question of conduct of a man towards the woman he either is going to marry or has married. But it would be a disastrous mistake to suppose (as unfortunately it often is) that this one relation of human life is exempt from the principle laid down in the text. Matthäi and Stier deal very crudely with this delicate question. It is not true that, with a view to marriage, a man *ought* to "look in order to desire." The love of one sex for the other which has been recognised

There is further something very striking about the particular manner of exciting the desire which our Lord selects for condemnation. There are many others, such as reading the wrong books, or hearing bad suggestions, going into dangerous surroundings, and so forth. These are passed by, the disciple being trusted to beware of them himself. The one selected is, *prima facie*, far less guilty than many others. In itself, the looking upon a beautiful human form or face may be an act which fills the soul with thoughts of worship of God the Creator. The most beautiful and fascinating of our organs, the eye, is employed in gathering impressions of that which in all ages has been looked on as an almost adorable phenomenon—human beauty. Think what the Greeks thought of human beauty, and what they have taught us in their monuments of it! Think again what science has taught us about the eye; not only its adaptability to its surroundings, but its age-long development and the mystery of its organism. And perhaps more marvellous than all are its limitations. We are told that only certain rays of light can be seen by the eye; there are probably countless rays which strike the retina, but are not perceived. If they could all be suddenly perceived, every single object we contemplate would

and hallowed by the Church is a complex thing, as it affects the whole complex human nature, with its sensuous and its spiritual activities. In its highest form this love is far more spiritual than sensuous, and any stimulating of the sensuous would, normally, be to the detriment of the spiritual element, and to the degradation of the whole feeling. But the "looking" spoken of in the text is a stimulating of the sensuous element, and in the case supposed would encourage the animal side of men's being at the expense of the spiritual. The stimulating of the spiritual activity would be not by "looking," but by communion of mind, which, of course, would be innocent. Moreover, it would be truer to say that a healthy passion of love is not stimulated by "looking," nor is dependent on it, but rather precedes it.

suddenly present a totally different appearance. The glory of a beautiful object is therefore due quite as much (as far as we know) to the limitations of our vision as to its powers. Those very limitations mean that there is a selection of rays of light. Without such selection we can hardly suppose that all the beautiful things in nature would remain so. There is, in short, an unspeakably wonderful correspondence between the machinery of the eye and that most glorious of all objects of beauty, a human being in whom the soul and the vital powers express themselves with a natural harmony, so as to tell upon the beholder's mind, through the intricate mechanism of the eye, the nerves, and the brain ; and in telling upon the mind it brings to its consciousness thoughts of things celestial, and promptings of some life not lived on earth, as if the soul were suffused with a divine radiance. This is what the contemplation of beauty may be. But when it is inspired by a particular motive, not all the wonder of the powers brought into play, or of the impressions stirred, saves it from the verdict of the Judge : "He hath already committed adultery with her in his heart." The words teach that no matter how supreme, nay, how transcendent man's powers may be, when they are employed for lawlessness the guilt is the guilt of a common, coarse sin, and meets with unsparing severity from the Saviour's judgment.

Enough has been said to show the prominence of the main idea of this verse (28), viz., the guilt of intentional kindling of desires. But there is a subsidiary thought of great importance and some obscurity. The sentence ends with the words "in his heart," and on these rests the ordinary interpretation that the thought of a crime cherished in the mind is as bad as a crime committed. This may be

true, but (as far as this verse goes) only if certain antecedents have taken place, viz., the intentional stimulus. Supposing, for instance, it were asked if the thought of a crime came unbidden to the mind, and was there harboured for a time, would that be as guilty conduct as the commission ? The answer would be : " Probably ; but this verse does not pronounce upon exactly that question. harbouring an unlawful desire is not the same thing as intentionally stimulating a desire which may or may not be lawful, by gathering, so to speak, fuel for it from outside. Christ only says that if this sort of stimulus is applied the guilt then is the same."

On the other hand, the evil of the stimulus is shown by its *effect*, not upon the outward actions, but on the thoughts ; and so we are undoubtedly taught the very great importance attached by our Lord to thoughts as distinct from outward acts.

It is to be noticed that if we adopt the ordinary classification the latter have to do with sins against man, the former against oneself, or against God. It is true that this distinction is vain, and yet the subject has interest, since our inclinations are to rate sins by their consequences, and in ordinary talk there is little said about them from any other point of view. But what consequences, in the ordinary sense of the word, are attached to a sin of thought ? A common answer would be that if evil thoughts are indulged in they lead to evil actions, and so prone are we to forsake our Lord's estimate that we habitually, and for the most part unconsciously, invest the outward act with far greater heinousness and gravity than the inward thought ; and, indeed, try to trace the importance of these solely to their tendency to be translated into action. But our Lord's words expressly exclude this interpretation : " He hath already committed adultery in his heart," can only

mean "before any action has taken place." It is a truism to remark that in this pungent and penetrating saying Christ shifted the estimate of sin among mankind from the outward and visible to the inward and spiritual region. But we generally ignore the profound significance of this change. An outward action has its effects on society, and it is always possible to bring it under condemnation as a violation of our duty to our neighbour, if it tends in any way to his injury. And such was the old Jewish condemnation of adultery. It was a violation of the claim of one member of a community on another. But on what ground was the new sin of adultery to be condemned? Could it be said that B, C, and D are in any way injured by an unclean thought in the mind of A? The injury would be so remote and indirect and uncertain, that we may at once put aside all humanitarian or social reasons for condemnation, in spite of the fact that we seldom or never refer to any others in our ordinary verdicts on men's conduct. The only ground for this verdict of Christ's is that the sin of thought is a sin against the divine in man, that is, God. The voluntary stimulating of desire towards the forbidden thing is in itself an act of rebellion, and the guiltiness of this conduct is thus found to consist in its breach of the relation of sonship to God. The subject, therefore, is strictly relevant to the earlier part of the discourse, wherein were set forth the conditions of membership in God's kingdom, or, in other words, the claims on man of sonship to his Heavenly Father.¹

¹ There is a most interesting analogy between this principle and that which determines the ethical character of gambling. In both cases we have to deal with an instinct which is practically universal, and of which the sudden disappearance would bring human life, as we know it, to an abrupt termination—the desire for sexual union, and the desire of getting, or of gain. The first conduces to the reproduction of life, the second to its

preservation ; both are fundamentally necessary to the continuance of the human race. But a very large part of the science of conduct deals with questions concerning the regulation of these desires, since it is evident that each issues in indescribable mischief, if uncontrolled. And the tone adopted in the Gospel on these two subjects is of uncompromising severity. The two desires must be ruthlessly subordinated to the law of the fulfilment of God's will ; they must never be first, and it is clearly recognised that the placing of them in subordination, and keeping them there, will involve pain. Now, just as in our text, the crime against God consists in a flat violation of this principle ; in other words, in stimulating instead of curbing a natural desire ; so in gambling there is a stimulating of the instinct for gain. Our duty towards God is invariably found, when faithfully performed, to be identical with our highest duty towards ourselves. Hence there is nothing surprising when we find that the violation of the duty of curbing natural instincts produces effects on character which are simply disastrous.

But if we are guided by the text we shall refrain from adopting this as the ground of our objection to gambling or to lust. Our Lord thinks it sufficient to point to the spiritual sin of defiance, quite irrespective of the result in action, and therefore it is no answer to this objection to gambling to say that many people practise it without going on to cheat or steal money. The same might be said of the sin denounced in our text, that very often no outward visible action follows. The sin in both cases is that a divine law pronounces quite distinctly how we ought to behave towards certain propensities with which we are born ; and, knowing this, we disobey the law by taking the opposite course. The after consequences help us to see the justification of the law, but should be kept quite apart from the sin.

So far, the parallel between the two cases is exact. But there is this difference : The sin denounced in the text is more easily seen to be wrong, because, on the whole, illicit unions between the sexes are condemned by public opinion, and the particular act spoken of is the first step towards an outward violation of law in the case of a particular person, whereas in gambling the stimulus to the instinct is in general and unconnected with a possibly resulting injury to a particular individual. But it requires no great effort of reflection to see that this distinction means very little. And granted, also, that there is something more hideous in the case of the sin of impurity, that should not blind us to the immensely greater severity of tone adopted by Christ towards sins of defiance of God, and selfishness (in the ordinary sense), as compared with the sins of the flesh. The true criterion of sinfulness is the extent to which an act, or a thought, is a defiance of God's known law.

One more point of parallelism may be noticed. When duly controlled the sexual instinct may be obeyed wholesomely, so long as it is in close connexion with the designed reproduction of life, or with the maintenance of the conjugal relation. So the instinct for gain may be wholesomely obeyed so long as it is not dissevered from work and labour. In both cases, as soon as there is such a severance, evil is encouraged.

IX

PLUCKING OUT THE EYE AND CUTTING OFF THE HAND

v. 29, 30

OUR Lord's method of vividness in teaching is admirably shown here. So also is His practice of so wording His exhortations that not even the most rabbinically-minded of His hearers could suppose that the command was to be obeyed literally. For the words "right eye," "right hand," are by themselves enough to prove this. The injunction is connected verbally with the previous verse, in which the sinful act spoken of was an act of looking. The warning therefore apparently concerns the organ of sight first, and then goes on to include the organ of action, the hand. But why only the *right* eye? If it were only a question of danger connected with the power of seeing it would be necessary to pluck out both eyes, since the retention of the left eye would mean that the temptations to misuse the faculty of sight would continue. Obviously, therefore, the word is thrown in for the double purpose of vividness and of showing that there is no question here of literal obedience.

Patent also to view is the reason of the choice of these two members. They are those which in popular estimation afford the most perfect indication of the Creator's skill. Doubtless, this estimate would be dis-

putable if we considered the other members of the body scientifically. But it is quite sufficient for Christ's purpose that, as ordinarily thought of, the eye is the most beautiful of all our organs, and shares with the hand a primacy in point of perfection of workmanship. Added to which the particular mutilation of the body here spoken of, would not only be a peculiarly savage and unnatural marring of the human frame, but would deprive it at once of its principal powers of acting on its surroundings. We constantly speak of the marvellous interaction of hand and eye in all swift and delicate operations and activities ; and the bare notion of the owner of these most wonderful living mechanisms, rudely and ruthlessly plucking out the one and hacking off the other, fills one with an indescribable sense of the rough power of the image employed, and we feel also the need of taking into account, in our interpretation of the passage, these special features of the figure.

We gain at this point some useful light on the question of the principles of interpreting the parabolic sayings of Christ. Abundantly clear though it may be that His precept is not to be thought of as requiring literal obedience, we should yet miss a great deal of its meaning if we did not take full account of the characteristics of the outward setting of the spiritual or moral truth conveyed. If it is not meant that we are to pluck out the eye, then why is the eye mentioned, and what further significance is given by the mention of the hand ? In answering these questions we begin to see the truth underlying the expression.

A human life deprived of hand and eye would be grievously incomplete as compared with another in possession of these organs in full working order. They are surpassingly useful in the conduct of life.

And so we are brought full upon the broad meaning of the whole injunction, that in our time of probation on earth it is comparatively unimportant whether our lives are complete;¹ that is, fully furnished for all kinds of acting upon our surroundings in the joyous plenitude of vigour and receptivity. The really important thing is that they should be safe. Short of actually destroying life we could hardly go further than such a mutilation of it as is here enjoined; in other words, a human life marred, crippled, and horribly disfigured, but safe, is better than one which is fair to view and richly equipped, and in full vigour of health and activity, but exposed to deadly danger. We find this very difficult to believe, and even if we arrive at believing it, we find that to do anything towards the carrying of it out in practice is perhaps more difficult still.

It will be well to set out the meaning in a somewhat different light from that indicated by these words, in the hope that, as there is in the saying an obvious appeal to our self-interest, we should expect the significance to be not very hard to understand. "It is better for thee"—when and where? in the next world or in this? At first sight we should say in the next world, according to a somewhat indolent method of dealing with many of Christ's sayings, which assumes that in the heavenly life all the most startling paradoxes in the Gospel teaching will somehow or other be made true. But it is probable that the inclination so to treat this and similar sayings, such as that of the dying of the seed (John xii. 24) and the losing of the life (Mark viii. 35), arises from the difficulty under which we permanently labour in conceiving of the action of the divine Spirit on the world of ordinary experience.

¹ Gore, "Sermon on the Mount," *in loc.*

For the question may be stated thus: how can we suppose that any life is the better for being violently marred and restricted? There is among us, especially in modern England, an almost passionate desire for a complete life; a life of complete self-expression and of ample fulfilment of all natural endowment. Such a desire is commonly taken as a certain indication of a lofty and ardent nature, and we foster it in those whom we love, looking forward to its bearing a noble fruit as it grows more intense. But we forget that as commonly conceived of such a hope is impossible. If we try to imagine a complete earthly life, we fail; the thing is unthinkable;¹ since in whatever department of life we make the attempt, the more vividly we picture ourselves as arriving at a goal, the more vividly clear it becomes that the arrival, if it ever comes about at all, will be only the beginning of fresh dissatisfaction. This theme has been handled by countless writers, and accordingly we seem to be barred from one of the three alternatives presented to us in regard to the question of how best to plan our lives. We may either strive towards the fullest expansion of our powers, or we may neglect them, or, thirdly, we may train them as carefully as possible, but yet go out of our way to deprive them, perhaps with harshness or even violence, but anyhow decisively, of the means of their manifestation in a way that at the time promises nothing whatever but loss. Of these three ways of ordering our lives, the first seems to be vitiated by the fact that it is a kind of grasping at a phantom. Something must be wrong with a plan of life which means aiming at completeness, when the only possible result must be either failure to reach it or profound dissatisfaction after doing so.

¹ Cf. Browning's "Easter Day," Part II.

Nor can we subscribe to the second of the alternatives, knowing full well that neglect means death, and shrinking from death with a horror that seems more active to-day than ever before since the days of the ancient Greeks. Thus we are thrown back on the third which our Lord enjoins ; so that we may perhaps feel that there must be, in theory at least, a great deal, perhaps everything, to be said for its adoption. The difficulty therefore consists not in this alternative being enjoined, but in the unsparing thoroughness with which the principle is to be applied. We do not mind the principle, but consistency in such a matter is nothing short of terrifying.

An excellent illustration of the principle, thoroughly carried out, is given by the conduct of the supremely great singer, Jenny Lind. It is well known that she renounced quite suddenly all her triumphant sway over the emotions of multitudes by ceasing to sing in public because she felt that there was something in the inebriation of such success which unfitted her for fixing her thoughts on higher things. No one can measure the immediate loss, not only to herself, but to masses of our countrymen ; and to many such conduct may well appear not only needless, but downright wrong. And yet, like all other examples of what is called other-worldliness, it irresistibly provokes admiration when the motive is known. The same act, if done from a wish for ease, would be unreservedly condemned as a breach of the law of stewardship, whereby the possessor of a talent is bound to use it. But the motive was simply to secure an opportunity for service of God uninterrupted by the glamour of successful service to man. This may be represented, of course, as selfishness ; the desire for self-edification gratified at

the expense of thousands of fellow-creatures. It is noteworthy, however, that mere self-edification is not really the motive. The true motive of all the highest conduct is godly, not selfish, though in acting on it the interests of self are triumphantly assured.

At first sight our text seems to be, so to speak, more on an earthly plane, and removed from the association with such lofty motives as the desire for unimpeded godly service. Not so in reality. "If thine eye *offend* thee." This word implies the placing of impediment in the way of some one moving forwards. But what kind of moving is intended to be designated? Not, probably, the journeying, which is a common figure employed, but the active motions of one employed in moving from one place to another on service.

Other aspects of the duty spoken of are these. The eye and hand would be figures denoting all sorts of resources, endowments, and blessings of life, ordinarily not only innocent but indispensable, and ornamental, but such as may under some circumstances become impediments to our highest activities. Health is one of these, so also wealth and the possession of friends. The really interesting and difficult question arises in connexion with the fact that what Christ enjoins is the merciless *voluntary* cutting off of these other beautiful appurtenances of life. They are under some circumstances to be cut off and *thrown away*,¹ as pestiferous elements in our being, such as if left alone would spread as it were a spiritual blood poisoning. What sort of circumstances are these?

This question does not concern what is known as fasting, nor, exactly, any form of voluntary asceticism. We can defer that difficult matter till we come to

¹ This is well brought out by Stier.

vi. 16, only remarking here that there are certain elements in fasting which are not touched at all by this command, such as, for instance, its social and ceremonial use. And asceticism properly means a continuous discipline of life with a view to the greater health of our whole being ; whereas if health be taken as one of the endowments hinted at, we have to think under what circumstances are we voluntarily or decisively to cut ourselves off from health as from something which has become a source of peril and disease to the whole system.

This and similar questions can only be touched upon in the briefest way. Physical health can never by itself become an “offence” to the follower of Christ ; yet few infirmities are so absorbing and so weakening as *valetudinarianism* ; and the moment that bodily health is allowed to take the first place in consideration, there begins a disorder in life and a want of proportion which may end in the most utter havoc. This must be prevented by health considerations being, at times, rudely flouted, when they conflict with the fulfilment of spiritual or moral requirements. But so as to avoid fanaticism ; *e.g.*, people who assume that physical needs (often imaginary) form an unassailable objection to the performance of duty, either towards God or man, such as divine service in church, or visiting the sick, are far from acting on the Saviour’s injunction. On the other hand, overwork and bodily collapse are often the results of a foolish aiming at completeness, the very thing forbidden by the text. We find, in short, that the command, when we faithfully try to fulfil it, requires always divine guidance. Had we no belief in such guidance its value for us would almost disappear.

Likewise the rich and fascinating endowments of

a love of literature, of art, society, and nature, are to be dealt with. Each individual must judge for himself how his "true and laudable service" of God is affected by indulgence in these tastes. If, as is probable, something of a conflict between the two is at times inevitable, he must see to it that the claims of service suffer no abatement whatever, but are decisively and always recognised as paramount. And further, we are bidden, when once the antagonism between the pursuit of such pleasures and the doing of duty is perceived, not to relinquish the pleasures gradually or reluctantly, but instantly to fling them away as if they were hateful to us; as if, in spite of the glory and the glamour with which they are invested, they were in fact both loathsome and dangerous. Why? Because all that is most dazzling about them, most winning, most uplifting, most inspiring, even all that tells us most about God Himself, becomes totally insignificant when once they are seen to be a hindrance in the way of our doing God's will.

The teaching is profoundly characteristic of our Lord's method in two respects. (a) It says nothing as to how and when the principle is to be applied, though those are just the questions to which man in his natural indolence most desires an answer. (b) As judged by reference to the ideas of human life, which we call natural or conventional, and which seem most widely prevalent, such teaching would be not only exaggerated, but absurd.

Again, the "casting away" denotes that there is to be no thought of resumption. But how often double-mindedness makes people begin a sacrifice without carrying it through, while they hanker after what seems to be lost, like the ploughman who looks back. It is doubtful if a half-hearted renunciation

is not worse than none at all. The injunction, in short, points towards a pruning of the vine of life's endowments, which ofttimes is done by God for us, but sometimes is to be done by ourselves, and always with gladness, because the loss is only temporal and apparent, the gain eternal.

X

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST ABOUT DIVORCE

v. 31, 32

[The following chapter is reprinted, with the consent of the Editors, from the *Journal of Theological Studies*. It is less ethical and homiletic than the rest of the book, being little more than an attempt to give the exact meaning of the four passages in the Gospels which deal with Divorce.]

THE object of this paper is to determine (1) the difference in sense in *μοιχεία* (and the allied words) in the New Testament, and “adultery” in our English modern use of the word. (2) How far modern ecclesiastical legislation is based on Christ’s teaching. (3) Whether any light is thrown by these verses on the composition of the Sermon.

In order to appreciate the difficulty of seizing the meaning of Christ’s teaching on this subject, it is advisable to range the versions of the principal sentence side by side¹ (R.V.).

¹ I have thought it best to leave questions of textual criticism on one side, for the reason that where the principal MSS. differ the main drift of the teaching is not seriously modified: *e.g.* when B omits the words of the T. R. in Matt. xix. 9 *kai γαμήσῃ ἀλλην*, Dr. Gore is surely right in saying (“Sermon on the Mount,” p. 216) that the sense remains the same. There remains, however, the kind of criticism which would delete the important excepting-clause in the two Matthew passages, A and B, on grounds of unsuitability. One of the most recent critics, Prof. Bacon (“The Sermon on the Mount,” p. 177), says the words are “certainly a gloss,” and appeals to the authority of Luke and to the general principle that Jesus “refuses to occupy the seat of the law-giver or magistrate in the imperfect conditions of the world”: and that “the exception *παρεκτός λόγου πορνειας* transforms the principle” (*i.e.* of an ideal standard) “into a rule, and involves Jesus in the rabbinic debate between the schools of Shammai

Matt. v. 32. A.	Matt. xix. 9. B.	Mark x. 11, 12. C.	Luke xvi. 18. D.
But I say unto you that every one that putteth away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, maketh her an adulteress; and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away committeth adultery.	And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery; and he that marrieth her when she is put away committeth adultery.	Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if she herself shall put away her husband and marry another, she committeth adultery.	Every one that putteth away his wife and marrieth another committeth adultery; and he that marrieth one that is put away from a husband committeth adultery.

It is plain from the wording of all four passages that there are certain important aspects of the subject of marriage with which our Lord is not dealing. He says nothing about the obligation to strict fidelity, as it is technically called, nor of the general principles of conduct which should be observed by married people towards each other. The theme of His teaching is the permissibility or not of divorce *a vinculo*: *i.e.* not mere separation, but separation so complete that the marriage contract is wholly null and void, and both parties are free to marry again. And the general sense to be gathered from all four passages is that Christ in the main reverts to the stricter view of this question which "hath been from the beginning and Hillel." The grounds of this distinction are not clear. In laying down the unqualified principle of the indissolubility of marriage, Jesus repealed and abrogated human divorce laws, and what is that but legislating? Again, the exception is, I admit, a piece of legislation: but it is also the affirmation of a principle, *viz.* that the divine ordinance of matrimony is only abrogated by one particular sin. Even if this last remark be disputed, it remains that those who wish to divest our Lord's teaching of all legislative element must cut out vers. 31, 32, and parallels altogether.

In the same page Prof. Bacon approves of Wendt's substitution of the Lucan reading *μοιχεύει* (in xvi. 18) for *ποιεῖ αὐτὴν μοιχευθῆναι*, on the ground that it is simpler. Certainly it is: but in the absence of any textual reason to the contrary, the more difficult reading is to be preferred.

ning," viz. that the marriage contract can never be as if it had not been, nor can the parties to it look upon themselves as wholly absolved from its obligation, except in the case when the wife has been guilty of infidelity, when it is implied that the husband is free. This exception is given by A and B, not hinted at by C and D.

The phraseology of A requires close attention. At first sight it seems to contain more than one impossible statement. Apparently a woman is made an adulteress not by the commission of the sin of fornication after marriage, but by being put away for trivial reasons; and the questions force themselves on the reader (1) is she any the less an adulteress if she is divorced for the grave reason? (2) if she is divorced for a trivial reason, why is the guilt hers and not her husband's?

The explanation depends partly on the modern restricted use of the word "adultery" compared with the Greek word which it renders in the Gospels. In all the four passages given above *μοιχεύω* (or the kindred forms of the verb) means to violate the marriage bond without any reference to the definite act of post-nuptial fornication, which is denoted in A and B by *πορνεία*. But our word "adultery" is restricted to the one way of violating the bond, which in A and B is called fornication, and hence the English rendering is very confusing. As a matter of fact, excluding John viii. 3, there is no passage in the New Testament where the words *μοιχεία*, *μοιχός*, and *μοιχεύω* necessarily refer at all to the sinful act (*πορνεία*) except, strangely enough, ver. 28 of this chapter, just before our passage.¹ In A, B, C, D the

¹ This statement, as far as I can determine, is strictly accurate. If John viii. 3 is included in the writings of the Evangelists, the word adultery (the noun and the verb) must be taken in its modern *compound* sense of sin

meaning of adultery is simply such ignoring of the bond as a man is guilty of who formally puts away his wife and regards himself as unconnected with her by any contract. B, C, and D state hypothetical cases in which the man manifests this view of the situation by marrying again: and the sin of adultery consists in his treating the original contract as null and void when it is not. The word for "to put away" does not mean simply to send out of the house to live apart, but to divorce formally under the impression that the first contract is thereby

against marriage consummated in a particular act. In classical Greek the verb and noun are used occasionally as synonyms of *πορνεῖω* and *πορνεῖα* (cf. Aristophanes, *Pax*, 958). But for the most part the usages of these words seem to apply indifferently to *πορνεῖα* and what we term adultery (so Liddell and Scott). May not the sense given in the New Testament, which *always* covers the breaking of the marriage bond, be an indication of the reverence felt for marriage? The exact difference between the three uses I would mark thus:

Μοιχεῖα (classical Greek), the sin of the flesh: properly by one married.

Adultery (modern English), the sin of the flesh: certainly by one married.

Μοιχεῖα (N. T.), violation of the marriage bond by the sin of the flesh or otherwise.

But it is important to remark further that in all the Gospel uses of the words *μοιχαλίς*, *μοιχᾶσθαι*, *μοιχεῖα*, *μοιχεῖειν*, except two, the idea of the sin of the flesh is not necessarily included, the meaning being simply that of violation of the bond. The two passages are John viii. 3 (4) and Matt. v. 28. The former has been dealt with. In the latter the word *μοιχεῖω* either = *πορνεῖω*, or the modern "adultery," and the question depends on whether the woman spoken of is supposed to be another's wife (so Zahn emphatically, p. 233; B. Weiss, p. 114; Stier, p. 128, vol. i., but dubiously, in a qualified and confused note followed by Alford). This is hardly doubtful. The whole passage is on the sin of adultery, not fornication, and though ethical precepts against the latter may be gathered from the passage (see Stier) by inference, the meaning of the word *μοιχεῖω* is to be settled by the plain sense with which v. 27 begins. Also there is the whole difference as regards the truth of the prohibition in the one case and the other. Human love is necessarily complex, and the animal element cannot be wholly excluded from the lawful passion of a man for a maid. But if *γυναῖκα* here is taken for "another's wife," the sense is perfectly distinct and logical. The word therefore is used here only in the Gospels (exc. John viii. 3 and 4) as "adultery" in modern English.

wholly dissolved. Therefore when in A nothing is said about the husband marrying again, the meaning of the text is unaltered. It is implied that a husband who goes through the formality of divorce with the intention of putting an end to the contract thereby is guilty of that special behaviour towards the contract which is called adultery.¹ If he marries again he only translates this false view of his position into action.

Further, in A, B, and C, Christ says that if a third party similarly takes the false view of the contract, and shows that he does so by marrying the divorced wife, he too is guilty of adultery. In C the guiltiness of the wife who so behaves is stated. If she takes the active part and divorces her husband—no reason being here given as sufficient—and marries again, she is an adulteress.

So far the meaning is fairly plain. But a very difficult expression is used in A. The husband who thus lightly thinks to dissolve the marriage contract by divorcing his wife is not said simply to commit adultery, but to “make her commit adultery.” Now this expression, which is in any case obscure, is quite unintelligible unless the above restricted view of adultery is adhered to, and the modern associations of the word put on one side. The woman is made an adulteress, not because she has been unfaithful to the contract ; *that supposition is expressly barred*—but because she is placed in a position of being different in the eye of the law from what she is in fact ; or different in the view of man from what she is in God’s sight. According to the one she is a freed woman, not a wife ; according to the other she is still a wife, still bound to her husband.

The glaring contradiction between truth and appearance constitutes a false or adulterous position.

¹ In C it is called “adultery against her,” the wife.

The woman is not said to *become* an adulteress voluntarily and deliberately, but to be *made* one ; so that the expression would cover the case of a wife who has done nothing but failed to retain her husband's love, and then has been quite unwillingly "put away." She is made an adulteress, or, more strictly, to commit adultery. It is as if the mere fact of her existence, apart from any wrong thoughts she may have harboured in her mind, is an offence against the divine law ; she is made in her person to embody the revolt of society against the purity and completeness of the marriage union. For in the "hardness of their hearts" men have ordained the legal instrument of divorce, and attached to it a meaning forbidden by God. They have construed it as though the cumbrous formalities of the *Gēt* obliterated wholly the sacred bond which preceded it ; and when a husband, wantonly and in obedience to his own whim, declares before the whole world that his life partner is wholly sundered from him and is free for re-marriage, he declares a lie, and she, however much in her heart she may dissent from this, is made, in virtue of her false position, to share in the community's disloyalty to God's decree. The wife may in her own private capacity disown her husband's action by refusing to marry again, but nothing can alter the fact that the legal position into which her husband has forced her is that by which society has formally and deliberately uttered its refusal to fall in with the divine requirements as to marriage.¹

¹ There is only one other conceivable sense of *ποιεῖ αὐτὴν μοιχευθῆναι* : that is, "causeth her to commit adultery" by making it practically certain that she will marry again. But this is not practically certain. Moreover, it ignores the meaning of *ἀπολύτω*. The guilt of *ἀπολύτως* consists in a formal assertion of a freedom which God has declared to be non-existent ; and this particular guilt is unaffected by any sequel. By adultery Christ means the attempt to dissolve the indissoluble ; what we mean is the act which really does dissolve it.

An important corollary from this interpretation remains to be drawn. In all civilised societies the question of the re-marriage of divorced persons is a burning one. As is well known, there is a difference in the law of the Eastern and Western Church on the point. In the former the re-marriage of the "innocent" is not allowed, and though not permitted by the canons of the Western Church, it has been recognised by the resolutions of the Lambeth Conference of 1888. But whatever there is to be said for this concession, it ought not to be based on the teaching of Christ as recorded for us. According to C and D, nothing can dissolve the marriage bond; according to A and B, the one sin, called fornication after marriage, can do so. But there is not a word to imply that after divorce consequent on this sin, the re-marriage of the guilty party is forbidden any more than that of the innocent.¹ It is not said anywhere that to marry the guilty divorced woman is to

¹ In Dr. Gore's "Sermon on the Mount" (Appendix III. p. 216), the following passages occur: "What has happened since then (the time of the post-Reformation canons) is that the opinion of a great number of the best English divines and commentators on St. Matthew has been expressed in favour of allowing the re-marriage of the 'innocent party' after divorce for adultery." And on p. 218: "Our Lord appears on this matter to be legislating rather than laying down a principle. . . . He appears to be sanctioning, in the case of an innocent and deeply aggrieved person, a dispensation which violates the logic of the marriage tie on grounds of equity; but this carries with it no necessary consequence of a similar dispensation in favour of the chief offender."

I think, on the other hand, it must be admitted that the Matthew texts give exactly equal right to both the innocent and guilty parties to marry again, in so far as the re-marriage of either the one or the other is not what our Lord in these words is defining to be adultery. Of course, there may be principles which He has enunciated elsewhere which justify a distinction; but no such principle is to be found here.

It would be equally true to say that the right to re-marry is withheld equally from the innocent and the guilty party. All I contend for is that inequality, in this respect, between the two cannot be justified from these verses.

commit adultery ; but it is said, in A and B, that to marry an innocent divorced woman is adultery. Accordingly, though there may be much to be said for the relaxation above referred to ; though the social conscience may be perfectly right in drawing a distinction between the guilty and the innocent party, there is no warrant whatever for it in these passages which give all our Lord's teaching on the subject. That teaching declares the re-marriage of either party, following on unjustifiable divorce, to be adultery ; perhaps we may infer that re-marriage of *either* party, following on justifiable divorce, is not adultery. If a third party chooses to marry one who has made havoc of one marriage-contract, and has snapped it by the commission of the great sin, he takes upon himself the responsibility of union with a criminal. The guiltiness of doing this must depend on whether the divorced person is repentant or not. But whatever the guiltiness may be, nothing whatever is said about it in the two passages in St. Matthew.¹

Let us now take notice what exactly the Church has done in drawing a distinction between the innocent and guilty party in respect of the legitimising of re-marriage. She has relied on the C and D passages as far as the guilty party is concerned, and on A and B in regard to the innocent party. A and B imply that divorce consequent on conjugal infidelity is the human pronouncement of a dissolution already effected,

¹ The particular sin of adultery which Christ is defining is committed in three ways : (1) by the man or woman who divorces the marriage partner on the assumption of freedom, when nothing serious enough has occurred to warrant it ; (2) by the third party who marries the divorced person ; (3) by the partner who is wrongly divorced. Nothing is said about *πορνεία* being adultery in the sense indicated, nor about the guilt of it generally ; nor is it stated that the man guilty of *πορνεία* should be treated in the same way as the woman.

which leaves *both parties* free to marry again. C and D, if taken separately from A and B, forbid any re-marriage to both parties. The Roman Church has taken up the intelligible position that all re-marriage in the lifetime of the divorced partner is forbidden. This, however, ignores A and B. The Eastern and the English Churches have not ignored A and B, but have gone only half-way in recognising the words. And yet, though not based on the Gospel teaching, this position is defensible. The principle on which we act is to recognise that the Gospel teaching only deals with a restricted portion of the subject, viz. the defining of the scope of the word adultery ; but that there is the great crime of snapping the marriage-tie, the punishment of which is not here specified, though its heinousness is strongly stated ; and which has to be dealt with by the Church. Though Christ excludes it from His definition of adultery, He implies that it is a crime of the first magnitude ; and the punishment inflicted by the Church is to deprive the sinner of that liberty of re-marriage to which, on a narrow reading of Christ's teaching, he would be legally entitled.

The critical questions which have arisen in connexion with these verses have been mainly concerned with the excepting clause in A and B. But there is another question to which less attention has been given, that is, whether vv. 31, 32 are not wrongly placed here. An argument in favour of an affirmative answer is to be found in the sharp difference of meaning of *μοιχεία* in vv. 28 and 32. A paraphrase of v. 28 would be, "Ye have heard . . . thou shalt not commit the sin which breaks the marriage bond : But I say that this sin which you call adultery is committed when anything is purposely done to stimulate desire, even if the desire be not translated into

action." Here we notice *μοιχεία* is expanded in one direction ; it is made to include antecedent actions likely to cause the commission of the sin itself, and certain to produce a corrupt state of feeling ; the inference being that man must curb his thoughts, not only his actions. Christ might have chosen another word than "adultery." But it was His method to employ familiar old commandments rather than to invent new categories of sins.

But when we come to v. 32 we are dealing with a subject only faintly connected with that of v. 28. The word *μοιχεία* is expanded in an opposite direction. Instead of bringing out further the idea of individual guilt and the relation of sinful thought and action, Christ exposes the disloyal behaviour of mankind in trying to separate those whom God had joined ; and in so doing He revives the early Scriptural idea of the permanence of wedlock. The share taken by different parties to the contract in the abortive attempt to annul it is indicated ; and the only point of contact with v. 28 is in the implication of that verse that fornication (*i.e.* the modern "adultery") alone can sever the bond which has been knit by divine operation and hallowed by divine decree. The sin which in v. 28 was analysed in respect of the comparative guilt of evil thought and action, is only glanced at in v. 32 in its relation to the ordinance of matrimony. This change in the meaning of *μοιχεία* seems to point to a dislocation of vv. 31 and 32.

It would be tempting to some to go further and say that if vv. 31, 32 do not belong to this context they are merely a version of C, and hence the *παρεκτός* clause is an interpolation. But for this there is no evidence. It is very probable that in regard to different versions of apparently the same

words, the disciples asked their Lord for an explanation of some saying, as we know they did on more than one occasion (Mark iv. 10; Matt. xiii. 26). Indeed in Mark x. 24 an unspoken question draws from Him just such a modification of His original saying as we find in two parallel versions. I would suggest that we have in this passage the genesis of many a diverse report. It is not unlikely that the hard saying and the modification were subsequently both preserved in writing, and some of the phenomena of the Synoptic Gospels would thus be explained.

XI

“SWEAR NOT AT ALL”

v. 33-37

THERE is no great difficulty about these verses. The Jewish law, as stated here, is quite simple, but our Lord's expansion of it clearly alludes to the practice, then prevalent, of avoiding the sacred Name of Jehovah, and swearing by such things as earth, heaven, Jerusalem, &c., out of an unenlightened sense of reverence. The prohibition, however, uttered to Christians is of a different order: “Swear not at all.” And if it be objected that strong affirmations require oaths if they are to be believed, Christ answers that we are to press towards a state of things where the simple word of a Christian will always be believed implicitly.

Such is the plain meaning. Certain questions, however, arise on an attentive consideration of the words. On what principle are we to reconcile Christ's own conduct before Caiaphas,¹ or His asseverations, “Verily, verily I say unto you,” which occur at the beginning of many striking sayings. Next, what is the exact sin of such swearing as our Lord forbids?

Coupled with the first there is, of course, the broad modern question: Why do we ignore this command in our law court procedure? And I would answer

¹ Matt. xxvi. 63.
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that, like several of the injunctions in the Sermon, it has to give way before the imperious law of Christian love. It is perfectly true, and is felt to be true, that to make a witness in a police court take an oath is a concession to human frailty. It recognises that the sacred associations of the Holy Name and the solemnity of the act of invocation are helps to the man's sense of truth, which ought to be quite strong enough without them, but is not; and, as such, it falls under the condemnation of v. 37. But that is only another way of saying the world is still imperfect, and conduct which would be wrong if men were all upright may be the best possible when a great many are actually depraved. And as we have Christ's own example to guide us, we feel that our practice of formal adjuration is justified.

Still, the exact reasons for His action, when considered in the light of this prohibition, are not yet plain, nor will they become so till we consider the meaning of the prohibition. At first sight they seem to be two: (1) Because all objects that are generally chosen to swear by are in reality sacred. (2) Our conversation ought not to need these solemn aids to truthfulness. It becomes clear, however, that the prominent and primary reason against oaths is, that as interlarded in conversation they are a form of irreverence; that is to say, it is a form of speech, or rather a way of speaking, which indicates a forgetfulness of the true relation of matter and spirit; in other words, the fundamental facts of life. Now this irreverence is most marked when the oath is uttered needlessly and lightly. If, on the other hand, it be spoken with a due regard to its sacredness, with deliberation, and with all the

sanction of an impressive ceremonial, and only when it is plainly needed, the risk of irreverence disappears. There is no forgetfulness of the great facts of the spiritual world, but a due recognition of them, coupled with a sound appreciation of the claims of our "love of the brethren" upon us. This explains, as far as we feel it requires explanation, our instinct in favour of legal oath-taking or solemn invocations at other times.

And yet it is true that the mention of the earth and the sky, &c., at other times is quite harmless, even without unusual safeguards. There seems to be a marked difference between this *mention* of things sacred and the invoking of them for purposes of attestation and adjuration ; and we feel, moreover, that this difference rests on something deeper than the fact that among Christians adjuration in a general way ought to be needless. And though our duty is for the most part fairly clear in this matter, the principle of prohibition requires further elucidation.

Let us notice, first, that our Lord chooses instances sufficiently numerous and distinct from each other to warrant us in saying, that there is no object or thing in heaven or earth which in ordinary conversation could be chosen safely as the subject of an adjuration, unless, of course, the adjuration were to be wholly meaningless. All things in the least likely to be chosen are too sacred to be sworn by. Now, mention of this class of things might be sinful, it might be ribald, false, or misleading, and would always be subject to the principle that we shall have to give account of our words hereafter. But it is to be noted that the employment of these things for purposes of adjuration is to emphasise explicitly that which is most sacred about them. It is to employ

them because they are sacred, since if there were no such associations connected with them, the sense and intention of the adjuration would evaporate. But what do we mean by sacred? Our Lord tells us distinctly. The sacredness of this particular class of things is in virtue of the close relation in which they stand to God the Creator, who dwells in this wonderful world which is His handiwork. Heaven is His throne; earth His footstool. Poets may utter in words of exceeding beauty and power other aspects of these glorious objects of thought and vision, but Christ reminds us that the truest and most vital fact about them is that they stand in a close relation to the Most High God. We men, His creatures, have a dim perception of that relation; otherwise, we should feel no inclination to invoke them for any purpose of attestation; and, therefore, such an employment of them in speech differs from any ordinary mention of them, in that it drags out into "the light of common day" that aspect of them which ought to stir feelings of awe and meek humility, and we have no difficulty now in understanding that if this be done without the excuse of a paramount need, we are guilty of "profaning," making common and secular that which we feel, and show that we feel, to be a mystery most solemn and sublime. Moreover, to do this without need is to do it for the sake of a merely personal convenience; namely, to secure for our words that belief which, by our own untruthfulness of character and by the untruthfulness of others, we have forfeited. Thus the sacredness of sacred things is used by sinful men with incredible recklessness to make good their own deficiencies, as if it were a weapon to be lightly brandished in self-defence, or a rag of clothing to be snatched up to cover our nakedness; only the illustrations fail to

convey that if man is defenceless and naked it is by his own fault, and that even his readiness to put these wonders of God's creative power to such ignoble uses is an involuntary witness to his sense of their great and awful mystery.

But there is one of our Lord's illustrations which stands in a class by itself : "Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black." The reason for the prohibition here adduced is not that the object selected to swear by is full of sacredness, owing to its close relationship to God, but rather that it is in close relation to the individual man, who yet has almost no control over it. The other three objects are forbidden because of their greatness ; this, the fourth, because of man's littleness. The topic of man's power over his own body is not pursued, else it might have been indicated that for woe, if not for weal, man has a dread power allowed him in this department. He cannot add to his strength by "taking thought," but by thoughtlessness and wanton self-indulgence he can diminish it ; he can mar, but not increase ; and even as to the hairs of his head, while it is true that he cannot add to their lustre, he can spoil it by evil living and reckless abandonment to the anxieties of earth. So that, if our Lord had pursued the subject into its narrower distinctions, it would still have conveyed the same lesson. The mastery which man may claim over his own self extends only to the power of injury ; and thus, just where we seem to be dominant, our greatness is a sign of our shame.

Thus swearing by certain objects is forbidden because they ought to tell us of God's greatness, His omnipresence, and His universal sway. Another class of objects is equally forbidden, because the

employment of them for this purpose would denote an idea of mastery which cannot stand the test of facts. In both cases, therefore, we learn that the practice of light and needless adjuration is incompatible with a sense of our true relation to God. There is in it an element of self-assertion which wars against the spirit of Sonship.

A few words may be spent on the closely allied topic of swearing or profanity as we know it in ordinary life. In moments of excitement or anger men use sacred words, under the impression that they relieve their feelings thereby. We notice again that if there is anything wrong in the practice the temper that prompts to it is purely self-assertive, and as such is, like that we have already examined, an offence against God, not only because of its irreverence but from its presumption. But that there is something wrong in the practice is obvious from the simple consideration, that unless the words used were known to be sacred, no one would feel the slightest inclination to use them. Nor is the case altered if the practice be excused on the ground that the words are meaningless, and only add a spice to conversation, or are meant to raise a laugh, as on the modern stage; since plainly if these words were stripped of every sacred association there would be nothing whatever amusing in their employment, no matter how artfully contrived. If this obvious fact about the use of profane words were more generally recognised, there would be no such thing as raising a laugh by a public and perfectly needless profane utterance on the stage or elsewhere. It is a matter of some interest and much humiliation to note that though this licence is conceded to the stage, it is still a marked proof of bad manners for people to swear

in society, before ladies or servants. Herein is a proof. How easy it is, when we cease to think of the principles of conduct, to fall into woeful inconsistency, waywardness, and untruth.¹

Besides this there is in the practice of casual swearing in moments of exasperation an element of self-indulgence. The use of a word, known to be too sacred to be legitimately used, causes a momentary forgetfulness of the cause of irritation. It is, in short, a counter-irritant; and here again its efficacy depends wholly on the underlying sense of the sacredness of the expression, or at least of the fact that others look on it as sacred, and that there is no valid objection to their opinion. If this be not so, and the words are genuinely felt to be indifferent, all temptation to use them dies away, as there is nothing in so doing which causes any diversion of feeling. Nothing then remains for a man addicted to profane language but to find other expressions which even he begins by thinking sacred, and so to go from bad to worse.

“Whatsoever is beyond these is of the evil.” Some commentators (*e.g.* Trench, “*St. Augustine*,” p. 220) explain these words principally with reference to the fact that whenever we take or demand an oath we are admitting a declension of human nature from entire truthfulness. This is true, but it is not necessary to introduce the topic at this point. The words are full of force if we take them in close connexion with the preceding, and restrict them to the idea of

¹ In regard to bad manners there seem to be these principles at work. Broadly speaking, conduct of three kinds would come under this designation : (1) That which shows want of consideration of others' rights ; (2) coarseness ; (3) irreverence. The first is an offence against Christian love ; the second is a needless obtrusion of the fact that we are closely related to the animals ; the third, a similarly needless obtrusion of the fact that we are related to God.

irreverence. Whatever goes beyond Yea, yea, Nay, nay, must be of the nature of an adjuration, which has been condemned distinctly in this passage, though with qualifications gathered from elsewhere ; and the condemnation is summed up in the expression “of the evil.”

XII

TURNING THE CHEEK

v. 38-42

IN regard to these most suggestive and striking verses it will be advisable to lay down as clearly as possible their exact scope, since, otherwise, an attempted interpretation of them easily wanders off into a discussion of topics, highly interesting indeed and important, but not in any way touched by this particular teaching of Christ.

After summarising very shortly a certain set of injunctions contained in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy, Christ lays down a principle of non-resistance to evil (or the evil one, or an evil man); and to illustrate His meaning He selects a certain limited set of conduct problems, and enjoins apparently a line of conduct to be pursued in each case. The problems may be classified as those which arise for an individual follower of Christ, when his neighbour invades his life with a claim on his time, energy, or property, based either on private need or public duty, and enforces the claim either with violence, or menace, or urgent petition. Now as to the line of conduct laid down, we have to ask, first, if there is a single principle in common to the four cases selected. What, for instance, is there in common between turning the cheek to the smiter, and going two miles when called upon to go only one, on

the public transport service? Clearly the answer is that the principle illustrated is the very opposite of what our Lord calls resisting evil; that is, of paying back evil in its own coin, of returning violence for violence, extortion by extortion, and so on. But when He gives a command like that of turning the cheek, it is necessary to go further and inquire if this is a positive or a negative command. In other words, is it meant to show us what to *do* or what to *avoid*? Are we, as professing followers of the Saviour, to do these things, to act in this way under these or similar provocations, or have we here merely a vivid instance of our Lord's method of laying down a paradoxical command to show that the temper which prompts to the *opposite* line of conduct is to be checked?

The answer is perfectly distinct. Christ's own conduct is more than once in flat contradiction to His own commands, if those commands are taken literally. When smitten (John xviii. 23) He did not offer the other cheek; and other such instances are mentioned by commentators. But it has not been so generally observed that the only possible corollary from this fact is that these four injunctions at once become merely negative prohibitions of an exceedingly limited scope. They may be correctly summed up in some such words as these: When provoked by the violent aggressions or tiresome claims of your neighbour, which threaten an infringement of your right to consideration, avoid retaliation; whatever you do let the retaliatory principle be wholly without effect on your conduct. As soon as ever we try to turn the prohibition into something like a positive command, one of two things happen—either we choose the literal sense, or we substitute for it some positive command which lies outside the range of the sayings altogether. In the first case, we are con-

fronted by our Lord's own example; in the second, we embark on topics which are not only irrelevant, but are discouraged by the very peculiar form in which the actual sayings are cast.

For instance, it is extremely tempting, when baffled in the endeavour to extract a rule of conduct from the words, to conclude that they lay on us the duty of acting always according to the rule of love to our neighbour; and many commentators have written on the kind of conduct which the rule of love dictates in cases similar to those adduced by our Lord. But in these verses there is nothing whatever about the rule of love. On the contrary, the conduct enjoined by the words, "turn the other cheek," "let him have thy cloak also," &c., is so clearly opposed to the law of love that it would be difficult to select any passage in the Bible much less suitable as a text on which to hang a discourse on loving our neighbour, or determining in certain difficult cases how love is to influence our actions. As has been remarked by commentators for centuries past, the actions here enjoined would frequently be provocative of evil, especially the last instance, the giving to every one who asks; indeed, as to all the four cases, it is easy to see that not only in modern complex society, but in the simpler social conditions of Palestine, the literal fulfilment of these commands would result in definite harm, and therefore he who acts so is acting not according to the law of love but the law of hate. To base, then, a homily about love on these particular verses is to introduce an irrelevance more than usually gratuitous.

So we find ourselves restricted to the bare prohibition, Do not retaliate. Before considering its meaning we may answer the oft-repeated question, "If Christ did not mean His commands to be taken

literally, why did He couch them in such definite language?" Some of His injunctions are to be taken literally, but one would think that to mix these with others that are only to be "taken metaphorically," or, as some word it, "spiritually," is only to weaken the force of them all. Indeed, this has often happened. There must be many cases where the plain impossibility of a literal fulfilment has deterred men from attempting any fulfilment at all. The commands are simply ignored.

Different answers have been given to the question. Some have said that beyond anything else Christ's object was oratorical vividness; others, that He was preaching to a people traditionally inclined to external and spiritless obedience, and that the only chance of saving them from a continuance in this was to give them precepts which could not possibly be construed literally. There is much truth in both of these, but I would prefer to emphasise what is brought out with the greatest plainness in this passage, Christ's recognition of the fact that if man is to advance ethically and spiritually he must think. These verses are primarily destructive in their tone; they prohibit a course of action which is to nearly all men supremely natural; and being thus destructive of a conventional code of ethics, they share the characteristics of all destructive criticism—they are in themselves unsatisfying, but profoundly stimulative of thought. No sayings were ever uttered which make it so difficult for a listener to acquiesce in mental inertia—as if the main problems of life and conduct were easily solved by what he heard. The most indolent, the most conventional minds have been for a time startled out of their groove by the sound of these arresting paradoxes, which, when looked at closely, are certainly barren of definite guidance, but all the more effective

as a challenge to rational beings to use their reason. In this sense their markedly incomplete character constitutes their perfection.

Yet it would be unsatisfactory if all that we could say about these injunctions were that they are not possible to carry out. But in reality, they lay down a principle which, though negative or prohibitive only, is yet of supreme value and requires constant reiteration. The main feature of such conduct as is here enjoined is not that it is loving, but that it is difficult. It is far from clear that it would have a good effect on the object of it, but it is in each case profoundly contrary to our inclinations. And it is not going too far, or straining the sense of the passage, to infer from it that in the countless puzzles of conduct which life presents to us, and about which our Lord has left us without definite instructions, there is this broad principle to be taken to heart, that our inclinations are bad guides. This certainly leaves a great deal unsaid which we would willingly hear, but, as far as it goes, it is deep and true; and men would do well, before allowing themselves to be disappointed at its incompleteness, to see if they have exhausted its teaching by practising it.

Thus if we take the numerous questions about which there is much discussion at the present day, we see that much perplexity would be spared if we could frankly begin by recognising the principle underlying these sayings. We are at our wits' end to know what to do about such matters as the treatment of bodily appetites of all sorts—recreation, its character and amount, friendships, comfort and luxury, matrimony and celibacy, war, sport and the treatment of animals, gambling and all kinds of getting, and competition. People clamour loudly at "the churches" for not laying down precise direc-

tions about these things, but "the churches" in restraining from doing so are only following the example of Christ, who apparently thought that in giving us a rule, parabolically stated, of distrusting appetites and inclinations, He was giving all that was good for us. For in spite of the copiousness and power with which He enforces the commands of the Decalogue, the obligation of love to God and to man, none the less it is true that throughout His teaching generally there is a silence, to us surprising, on such questions as those enumerated, leaving His followers to trust to personal spiritual guidance, and sharply discouraging them from looking for mechanical rules. The result is that any sincere follower of the Saviour is often and often in dire perplexity for a time. He has to wrestle with conflicting claims and divergent duties, but he feels that in so wrestling he is gaining something very precious which would have been lost to him if he had relied on definite precepts, because the difficulties of decision throw him into closer contact with the divine Spirit, and in that contact he feels that his true life consists. As a help then towards facing life's problems in the right frame of mind, Christ makes it perfectly plain in these verses that we are to clear our motives by sternly eliminating from them the most imperious, the most obvious, and the most universal of them all, viz. obedience to inclination. And by degrees man learns that in proportion as he obeys this order life is simplified. Enough and to spare, perhaps, of difficulty remains to give us chance of growth to our full moral stature; none the less, it remains true that the voices which bewilder us in our pilgrimage, the false lights which flicker and dance around us to draw us from the narrow way into the quagmires, are those of egoism, or, more simply, the appeals of passion, ambition, and greed of every

sort. As we learn to banish them the footprints of the Saviour become distinct in the path before us.

These sayings are therefore in the highest sense educative. They reveal our Lord's determination that, come what may, His followers are not to be deprived of the necessity of deciding for themselves as to problems of conduct (even as to those so delicate and complicated as arise from the aggressive spirit of a neighbour or a brother), for therein lies our hope of growth in nearness to Him. But at the same time He makes it clear that He is not simply leaving us to flounder in bewilderment. He reveals His compassion for us by helping as far as the situation allows. Even in these verses which stop short of the promises richly given elsewhere, He takes away the spell of the grand false motive under which mankind habitually tends to fall. It is much to be thus far helped, for true mental education (*i.e.* training in growth) consists in presenting difficulties to the child, apparently but not really too great for him, and at the same time letting him feel that his teacher perfectly understands his need.

XIII

“LOVE THINE ENEMY”

v. 43-48

THE paragraph beginning with ver. 33 concerned man's duty to his neighbour in the matter of speech ; vv. 38 to 42 gives injunctions as to neighbourly actions. This last paragraph deals with the duty of feeling, and so may be regarded as a climax.¹

We notice first an injunction brought into sharp contrast with the old law, or rather with the popular idea of it. Then a promise peculiarly spiritual and unearthly of an increasing likeness to God in one great respect. Then a deterrent, very gently-worded, appealing to shame and assuming a sense of high vocation. Further, the contrasted conduct is shown to be inferior, because there is in it nothing that rises above the conventional standard. The paragraph and the chapter closes with an exhortation which, while suitable to the particular command in v. 44, may also be taken as applicable to the whole section, which closes at this point (viz. vv. 27-48).

The command “love thine enemy” reminds us that “love,” in the sense of the Greek word, is an emotion to some extent under the control of the will. This is often denied in ordinary talk. People get into the way of assuming that their likes and dislikes are wholly beyond their own control. The same idea

¹ Stier and others.

prevails with regard to "believing." But our Lord frequently urged men to "believe." The truth is that in both cases the Greek verb denotes some action or effort which, though not independent of the emotions, is certainly the result of will. In "believe" there is a large element of trust; and in "love" such ideas as that of "suppressing all vengeful feelings," or even of "acting kindly towards," may be regarded as a component part, anyhow in the initial stages.

We may also notice that the very difficult question as to the Christian's right feeling towards one who is obviously defying God, ignoring the plainest dictates of duty, is not here touched upon.

But whatever reservations it may be necessary to make as to the meaning of "love," it is indisputable that Christ here commands something which is above man's natural instincts, and which most people would say is above his natural powers. Even if the word were restricted to its least exacting signification, as equivalent to "wish for the welfare of" thine enemy, how many of us could honestly say that we are able to rise to this, in the case of one who has malignantly thwarted us, or gone out of his way to slander our name and make life harder and bitterer than it would be if he had never been born? Or even suppose one with whom we are constantly thrown, who irritates or wearies us every hour, our wish for such person's welfare is very often only of a languid and abstract character; certainly it falls short of the point where we feel impelled to take trouble. Hence arises the important question: Is this command one of the paradoxes in the Sermon which are obviously not to be taken literally, such as that of turning the cheek to the smiter, &c.? And the answer is quite complete. In the case of the real paradoxes our Lord's own conduct contradicts the literal precept, but in the case of

this command He fulfils it. The records of His life, and especially of His Passion, are full of indications of His deep and tender concern for the highest moral interests of His bitterest, most brutal enemies. Otherwise we should never have known what the fulfilment of the precept meant, so utterly alien to ordinary human nature it had always been, and always, we may conjecture, would have remained. In short, the command is given us with the most emphatic and unqualified stringency, and it is supported by the unvarying practice of the Saviour Himself.

None the less, there is a pronounced disposition to whittle it away, and a very common form of protest against the literal observance of the words is based upon the dislike which many people feel for a man whose benevolence makes him equally cordial to all. It is true that this conduct is sometimes not only undiscriminating, but actually due to a remarkable want of discernment as to the differences between A and B; so that it would seem that, after all, the common feeling on this subject is a protest not against unvarying cordiality to all, but against the inability to show real sympathy with any. If the feeling goes further than this it is the outcome of selfishness, of a desire to monopolise the affections, or anyhow the kindness, of one who is much sought after by others.

But all doubts on the subject are resolved by reference to the Saviour Himself. The amplitude of the welcome He gave to all sorts and conditions of men, His sympathy, which drew to Him the intensest devotion of the most diverse characters, have never been made the subject of accusation against Him. The more perfect a character is in this respect the more the various claims are satisfied. A general love is shown equally to all, not in order that igno-

rance as to the human heart may be covered, but as the fruit of the deepest insight and the richest understanding; so that loving kindness shown in action is combined with the true sympathy which recognises affinity of mind and temperament, but never fails, even in quarters where it is not returned nor even understood. Such are the characteristics of Christian love. The love which is merely a human passion cannot exist without manifesting a desire for a return. It is fed by reciprocity which must be felt, but Christians make a profound mistake and suffer unspeakable loss in requiring, as a return for their "*agape*," a consciously-enjoyed satisfaction of any kind. This is to introduce the element of bargaining into life, against which, as has frequently been noticed, Christ's emphatic warnings are directed.

The promise attached to the command is at first difficult: "That ye may become sons of God." But the idea of sonship in Hebrew is closely connected with that of *moral likeness*¹ (cf. "Sons of the Theocracy," xiii. 38). So the idea is that during the time of our probation we have the chance given us of becoming assimilated to God in one respect—in the practice of distributing kindness in every direction impartially. It is almost as if the bliss of the Godhead were in pouring benefits on the unworthy! and it is to be noticed that the reward is the very contrary of that usually demanded by man as if it were a right, viz. success in winning or regaining affection. We are constantly shocked and amazed at evidence of love shown in the completest self-renunciation being yet quite unsuccessful in winning the stubborn or melting the hard heart; and when in spite of this the love

¹ So Dalman, p. 115, English translation. It therefore is not important for purposes of interpretation whether we read with the moderns *υιοι*, or with Chrysostom *διμοιοι*.

is persevered in, we stand baffled before a mystery. Such likeness to Christ seems to belong to another world. But it is promised to us in this world, and just where it loses the *expected* reward it wins the *promised* crown—that of increasing approximation to the Divine likeness.

By way of deterring us from the opposite line of conduct, our Lord then asks the pertinent question by way of contrast, "What reward have ye?"¹ The question is abrupt and colloquial in tone, something like our words, "What do you get by it?" and the reference to the publicans suggests that by adopting the conventional standard of conduct, the very class of men whose whole lives were bent and even sacrificed to secure profit, become thus the type of failure to get it. There is an important parallel also to be noticed. Christ indicates the conventional standard by two descriptive phrases, "loving those who love you," and "greeting only the brethren." The question after the first suggestion is : "What reward have ye?" but after the second the striking words are used : "What do ye do more" (than others)? The Greek word is untranslatable by any one English equivalent, but the meaning seems to be what the Revised Version gives, and is tantamount to "How does your conduct differ from that of the ordinary conventional men and women of the world?" and then the rebuke is pointed by the expansion of the meaning—not only worldly people, but the outcasts of society and the despised Gentiles do as much.

Obviously, therefore, we are to infer that the only hope of getting a reward is to rise above the ordinarily accepted standard. As long as we restrict our feelings

¹ It is remarkable that this expression in the present tense seems to refer plainly to the idea current in Palestine at that date of a reward laid up for individuals in heaven.

of charity and kindness to those who have the same feelings for us, we miss the real reward—the gradual approximation to the Divine character; or, to put it paradoxically, when we love only on conventional lines, we may get a return, but no profit. But conventionality in this matter is exactly what people ordinarily mean when they speak of conduct as natural; and what our Lord speaks of as “over and above” is exactly what is considered unnatural. Thus the subject has many ramifications. To take an instance where real kindness is of the “over and above” type: if A rudely tells B of some fault, not with any considerateness but merely in wrath, we should reckon it a proof of great self-command if B returned no angry answer, but went on quietly with his usual life much as if nothing had happened. Now this would be worthy of some admiration, but it would not be “over and above” in the sense of this saying; it would be if B went out of his way to do A an unostentatious kindness at much cost to himself. But the question will be asked, “On what possible grounds can he *feel* kindly towards him?” Some few people might bring themselves to do a kind deed and say nothing about it, but the injunction refers to feeling; and is it reasonable to suppose that after severe provocation he can genuinely feel well disposed towards his enemy? He may command his actions, but friendly feelings must have something to stir them other than wholly hostile experiences.

Let us recognise first that if we profess to be followers of Christ, whether it be His conduct or His precepts, nothing can convict us more terribly of the utter sham and wilful defiance of our *ordinary* habits of thought and dealing with each other than the cogency and force of this trite objection. The meaning of the grand claim upon us is as clear as

daylight; no evasion is possible. Unless we strive all our lives long to bring our thoughts and tempers and affections into thorough conformity with the command, flat disobedience is the only alternative.

It may, therefore, be of some use to notice that what our Lord must have felt towards Pilate, Judas, and such as the soldiers who despitefully entreated Him, was compassion—a feeling which it is quite possible to blend with righteous anger. Supposing, for instance, a saint-like Christian were vilely used by a fellow-Christian, the personal element, as we call it, would be so completely eliminated that he could calmly consider the man's position, in the light of such facts as the redemption of the world, the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the judgment at the last day. Would not the spitefulness be felt to call for pity? An ordinary man could pity a lunatic if he were reviled by him without the slightest reason. But if the reviler were sane and responsible, is he not far more to be pitied? Anger, doubtless, has its place, but on cool reflection the feeling which ought to be uppermost is compassion for a weak and wayward fellow-creature, who is so completely blind to the first grand obligation of his Christianity, that while he professes devotion to Christ he can allow himself to drift along towards the grave in utter alienation from the Spirit of his Master, where He touches most definitely and distinctly on our daily life. How can it be contended that a person so situated has no claim upon our pity? Some such feeling is possible for those who can eliminate the sense of wounded vanity, and all that might rankle in the recollection of hate and scorn. Freedom would then be given to the power of the fact—so often ignored—that in God's sight each individual soul has an absolute value. “Every one who comes within the range of Christ's sacri-

fice is individually worth the sacrifice that saves him.”¹

Meantime, it is worth remarking that in this passage of the first Gospel, as well as in the parallel, Luke vi. 28, the broad command, “Love,” is illustrated by the narrower “Pray for” those who ill-treat you; the second injunction being enforced by the example of Christ. We are apt to assume that this order is somewhat less exacting than the command to treat kindly (“do good to,” Luke vi. 27) would be. This is a mistake. To pray quite sincerely for an enemy, or for one whom we fancy we have a right to despise, is exceedingly difficult, as it lacks, or ought to lack (vi. 5), all stimulus of human applause.

“Ye therefore shall be perfect.” It is not clear whether we ought to take this as a promise or a command. In English the future tense may easily give a certain imperative force, while the pure imperative would give hardly anything of a promise. But in Hebrew² it is very probable that the imperative force predominated; and the tone of the English, “you are to be,” may be compared. We may, therefore, assume the sense to be, “You, as members of the new kingdom, newly convinced of your sonship to your heavenly Father, are to look forward to ‘perfection’ as your goal, your aim, your destination. In all matters such as those touched upon, in respect of fulfilling the moral law in your dealings with your neighbours, you have to be satisfied with nothing short of perfection. That is what your sonship involves. The perfection set before you is that of your Father in heaven.”

¹ Strong, “Christian Ethics,” p. 129.

² Winer, p. 395, omits the passage, and his instances are all prohibitions, e.g. “thou shalt not.” Moulton’s note states that in Hebrew all prohibitions are in the future.

But, as St. Chrysostom reminds us, children can only be perfect as children.¹ For the sense of the passage this remark is important. Many a careless reader, profoundly conscious of his own weak will and languid aspirations, comes upon this exhortation and passes it by with a vague feeling that it has nothing to do with such as he is himself. But if so, to whom does it apply? Why were these strange words spoken to the mixed multitude in Galilee? Because the perfection of children is not the inconceivable thing for the children of God that the divine perfection itself is. For instance, part of a child's perfection is to obey without understanding why. This is within our range. So also to have a certain serene conviction, in reference to moral duty, that no commands are arbitrarily laid upon us, however difficult they appear to be; nor is the fulfilment of them (such as the Father demands) out of our reach (though very likely such fulfilment as man recognises is quite out of our reach). Nor, again, is the saying a depressing insistence on an ideal, failure to reach which means utter failure. There is profound encouragement in the idea of "perfect," meaning perfect in a stage of growth; so that the opposite idea is not, as many seem to suppose, "good for nothing," but "incompletely developed in regard to the stage of growth reached." There is all the difference between the condemnation belonging to this kind of shortcoming and that which attaches to active defiance or open hostility to God's command. What is hinted at is not at all the unimpeachable rectitude of a life of good works, without flaw or omission, but a state of mind of which the prevailing note is trust, and failure to enter into it means not the doing of wrong things so much as a loss of peace.

¹ Cremer, *s.v.*, *τέλειος*, p. 568: (1) complete in its own stage; (2) high, pre-eminent; (3) morally blameless.

XIV

RIGHTEOUS FOR MEN'S APPLAUSE

vi. 1

THERE is an obviously possible connexion with the end of the last chapter. It would be conceivable that men could aim zealously at a standard of righteousness, or, as we should now call it, virtue, which would be the highest possible—the divine standard of perfection, in short, in order that they might attract men's attention. This is a motive strictly forbidden to us ; and we observe that the reason given is that if we disobey the prohibition, we “have no reward with our Father which is in heaven.” That is to say, God's approval of the “righteousness” is withheld if it is done from this motive. This reminds us of the text, “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” It is evident that in our Lord's view there is no room for this kind of ambition. It is clean contrary to the true service of God, and must not be introduced into “the kingdom of heaven.”

The words are very simple, and it is only necessary to add that the expression “to be seen of them” means, in the Greek, “to be looked at by men as if they were looking on a public show or spectacle.” So it may be paraphrased as above “in order to attract the attention of mankind.”

But simple though the words are, they raise most complex questions. It is impossible to be satisfied

with an interpretation of the prohibition as if it referred merely to the coarse parade of service to God, which is presently described as practised by the Pharisees. Nothing is easier or more common than the referring of these most difficult precepts to some infirmity of the Jews (or a small sect of them) which we flatter ourselves we can safely and unthinkingly condemn ; and having to our satisfaction thus shifted the responsibility from ourselves, we pass on to the next verse. By such a use of history as this the difficulties of some of the words can be diluted. But all the depth and value of the great Sermon is thereby lost. If it were really true that its teaching referred only to the Pharisees or Scribes or lawyers of an obscure little country in Asia Minor, why do we give ourselves the trouble of reading it at all ?

Perhaps the best way of confronting the questions which underlie the words is to admit that the prohibition is consonant to a deep and general instinct among right-thinking people, and that where virtue is understood to be independent of all anxiety as to the notice it may attract, it is at once felt to be worthy of admiration. But that is not a rational explanation, and it would be most unsatisfactory to have to abandon all quest for the principle on which the prohibition rests, since the instinct (which is all that then would be left) is found to be far too weak to influence men's conduct very considerably. It has often been observed that ambition, "the last infirmity of noble minds," is the deadliest and most stubborn and deep-seated disease of good people; and we should take notice that in His moral teaching our Lord pays far more attention to the self-deceit, duplicity, and hypocrisy of *good* people than He does to the lawlessness or open defiance of the bad.

We can imagine some one pleading in defence of

ambition and against the precept of Christ in some such way as this :—

“ Ambition for honour is generally taken to be the feeling which impels a man to choose a public career in order that his efforts in such causes as philanthropy, statesmanship, or public service of any kind may receive due recognition. It is not at all necessary that he should be eager about the material remuneration of his work ; the passion is concerned primarily with honour alone, and it is found potent to stir men to wonderful achievements, even if the recognition has no chance of being secured till after their death. Now the precept in Matt. vi. 1 is, like many others in the Sermon, quite inapplicable to the world as we know it ; that is to say, if obeyed, it would spoil a great deal of what we all feel to be good in the world. That is the first general caution with regard to the text. Secondly, it is universally recognised that in training of character in the young, praise is the best of all *stimuli* to effort, and where it is withheld the young mind and spirit seems to lose nourishment. If, then, praise is an undeniable good in education, how is it possible to deny it a place in mature life ? If it is an invariable concomitant to vigorous and beneficial effort, why not make it also an object ? and as soon as it becomes an object of effort the precept of Christ is directly disobeyed. Thirdly, modern life is exceedingly complex, and there are many questions of conduct concerning which the only guide for an ordinary man is the deliberate opinion of the best men with whom he can come into contact. If he follows that opinion he secures their approval : why not then say simply that he ought to aim at that approval at once ; and if he is to aim at it, then he must act so that they know what he is doing ; in other words, he is to ‘do righteousness before men.’

Lastly, if the precept were generally obeyed, all reason for the conferring of public honours, titles, recognitions, &c., would disappear, a large element in our social life would be pronounced a senseless and mischievous blunder, and the consent of all ages on this subject would have to be contemptuously set aside."

And more might be said. But while much of this subject must remain difficult, certain objections may be readily answered. The praise of a parent is the legitimate aim of the child, because the parent is the embodiment to the child of the Fatherhood of God; and the chief hope of the abstract idea ever being grasped lies in the existence of the earthly relationship. The parents' approval is, therefore, ideally, God's approval. Similarly, prizes given by educational establishments are justified by the formula that the schoolmaster is *in loco parentis*; and it may be said that honours conferred by the community on individuals have something educational in their meaning. Practically they would be justified as an incentive to others to good effort, but this is in contravention of the Christian precept. Ideally, they are the expression of the best opinion which the body politic can form *ex post facto*, that such and such conduct is worthy of approval; and in formally expressing that approval society is performing a duty to itself apart from that of rewarding the individual. It is quickening its own moral sense by the deliberate expression of a moral judgment on actions too large in scope, and wrought on too spacious an area to escape notice. Their bigness claims a verdict, and the body politic must give it. Thus the real justification of such pronouncements lies in the fact that man in his corporate capacity has to utter what he believes to be the mind of God. Just as the judge delivers the sentence of death under the conviction

that he has a commission to pronounce to men the divine displeasure at certain actions, so the Sovereign is the agent of God when he utters the divine approval. If this were better understood, much of the vulgarity of modern life would disappear.¹

Next, as to the wisdom of relying on verdicts of wise men as the best guide for conduct in a complex life, it only needs to be pointed out there is a wide difference between taking the opinion of the best men as a guide to actions, and the aiming at the applause or attention of the mass of men as an end of life. The applause is sought for by trying to give a certain appearance to the character (whether by action or otherwise), but there need be no pretence in being guided by wise advice. This latter is obviously in many cases the only thing to do (so long as it is recognised that the seeking of human advice should be treated as merely a rough way of ascertaining God's will). Some modern teaching as to the *summum bonum* of life being "truth to self" runs into an error worse than that from which Christ here warns us. If applied at all consistently it would result in a spurious originality, a nonconformity for the sake of not conforming, and so gaining credit by dissidence, which is less securely promised by agreement.² Thirdly, as to the effect of ambition as a stimulus to useful achievement. It is indisputable that much useful and civilising work has been done by men who were obviously sensitive on the subject of men's applause. But the text does not deny this. It is equally true that much good, perhaps better, work has been done by men indifferent to renown. And if in the case of the first group their activities would have been weakened had the stimulus of ambition

¹ In this connexion the modern fashion of memorials and testimonials requires consideration.

² e.g. Emerson's Essay on Self-Reliance.

been withdrawn—which we shall never know—it is impossible to calculate how far society would have lost. The hypothesis presents us with a picture too complicated to interpret. Christ's teaching does not touch the question how far society is in debt to the passion of ambition for the civilisation which it enjoys. It asserts with the utmost emphasis that Christians are to disregard public approbation as an *end* of actions. They are not forbidden to use it as a means, to take account of it, or to sway it. But they are to be independent of man's estimate of themselves as a governing motive of conduct. That estimate need not be cynically flouted, though it be not slavishly followed: a Christian's relation towards it should be a relation of detachment. Without further discussion of this interesting question we may go so far as to say that if this detachment had characterised the work of all social reformers, statesmen, and pioneers of every sort, the resulting achievements would have been quite as beneficial to mankind as, in fact, they have been. There is no antagonism between the ethical precepts of Christianity and the good tendencies of civilisation, though it is very difficult to distinguish those good tendencies from the bad.

But if man is to be independent of the motive of ambition, what is to take its place?

It might still be thought possible to protest that the warning is only against coarse angling for applause, such as is hinted at in the Greek word meaning "to be gazed at," and illustrated by conduct of a downright vulgar sort in vv. 2, 5, and 16; and that there is no denunciation here of the ordinary commonplace man's motives, which are to ascertain what people want him to do, and to do it with all his might, hoping without any vainglorious display to secure a just measure of approval.

Such an answer would show a misunderstanding of the warning given by Christ. The reason why vulgar parade of virtuous action is to us, apart from any deep principle, contemptible, is not only that it is worldly in its motive, but that it is doomed to failure, and this failure is largely due to Christ's denunciation. But if no other motive than this worldly one can be taken and acted on, and supposing that any particular ostentation were successful, it would be plainly unreasonable to despise it. If there is no spiritual or heavenly motive to be apprehended, then the earthly one is not only justifiable but laudable, and the only question is how to avoid overdoing it. The Pharisees clearly were not unsuccessful in their attempt (vv. 2, 5, 16), and it would be foolish to despise their ostentation, which was successful then, merely because it would fail to-day.

Angling after men's favour, or applause, or popularity, or reason, will take different forms in different surroundings. In one age and country it has been found advisable to stand and pray in the market-place; in another to stay away from church and entertain friends. In some circles it seems profitable to brag; in others to hint delicately at some virtuous action; in others, again, to keep silence. It matters absolutely nothing whether the display be coarse or refined—all depends on the aim in view. If it be not men's approval and recognition, what is it to be?

The answer which it is safest to give is that which is supplied by our Lord's example. The end of all a Christian's actions should be conformity to the will of God, which is ascertained by prayer. There are many, no doubt, to whom such words seem unpractical, especially at the present day, when prayer seems to have lost power. But the principle must be the same. If they cannot feel the personal guidance of

the Holy Spirit they must fall back on the highest and purest conceptions which they can form of duty, and in genuine sincerity follow them ; but with genuine longing also after something less uncertain, less fluctuating, less cold, viz., the sense of God's own Presence with them. Without looking for it in any bargaining spirit, without venturing to anticipate either the time or the method of its bestowal, a Christian who so orders his life may be perfectly confident that the promised reward will not fail.¹

¹ Readers of Butler may feel that his treatment of part of this subject is apparently out of keeping with the plain meaning of this text and of v. 12. It is certainly to be deplored that the great moral philosopher did not give us the benefit of his ideas on ambition in a sermon devoted to the subject ; and further, it may be said that in his remarks on the desire for esteem he has forgotten the passage in the Sermon on the Mount with which we are dealing. For instance, on p. 394, Sermon I., on Human Nature (Bohn's edition, 1876), he observes : "To have no restraint from, no regard to others in our behaviour, is the speculative absurdity of considering ourselves as single and independent, as having nothing in our nature which has respect to our fellow-creatures, reduced to action and practice. And this is the same absurdity as to suppose a hand, or any part, to have no natural respect to any other, or to the whole body." Does not the drift of this, as well as the illustration employed, go contrary to the teaching of Christ ?

Butler's greatness as a thinker demands some consideration of this point. On p. 390, note, he remarks : "Desire of esteem is a public passion ; because the end for which it was given us is to regulate our behaviour towards society." So a disposition to regard our Lord's words as paradoxical (*i.e.* such as can safely be disregarded) might shelter itself under the ægis of the bishop in this way : If it be true that this desire is natural and implanted by God for the good of society, then it is right to act upon it ; that is to say, to pursue the esteem of mankind as an end ; since in so doing we may be sure we are benefiting society. This line of argument is nearly the same as that already dealt with. But we should observe in addition that the Bishop is here arguing not about the innocence or wholesomeness of the desire for men's esteem, but about its being a separate thing from benevolence, and there is no writer from whom it is more unsafe to quote isolated *dicta*. But apart from this, and fully admitting the force of the observation quoted, do we find a discrepancy ? In the first place, it is not to be inferred that the usefulness of a certain passion in man's nature for the benefit of society is any proof that it can be heedlessly gratified without danger to the individual's character ; it is

merely a reason for thinking that, if it be so gratified, whether the individual be benefited or not, society on the whole will gain rather than lose. Now the importance of this fact about any natural desire does not consist in its giving us an excuse for its gratification, but in the evidence it affords of the benevolence of the Author of nature. And supposing that the beneficial effects continue even if the gratification of the passion be excessive, foolish, and baneful to the individual, then the evidence here spoken of is rather strengthened than weakened; for the heedless and wanton gratification of passions is so common among men, that society would be in a far worse plight than it is if the result did not, in some cases anyhow, tend to the general welfare rather than the reverse; and the fact that this is so should lead us to recognise a token of God's kindness rather than of man's wisdom. Parallel cases could easily be found. Self-preservation is a natural instinct, and if it had not been implanted it is not conceivable to us how the world would go on. But if it be allowed place in a man's mind as a *dominant* motive it easily degenerates into valetudinarianism, and leads to a wreckage of his life. Yet even this most grievous condition of the individual is not always and for certain an injury to society. It is conceivable that such a person discovers and promulgates laws of health by which others can profit. At any rate, he may become a warning, and it may be that some people learn more from a life so spoilt than from many wise sayings. This, of course, is not certain, but neither is the denial of it. Only, if it be true, it does not justify any man in deliberately so ordering his life as to benefit others only as a deterrent.

Again, the desire for esteem is manifestly inferior as a motive of conduct to two others—a sincere love of duty for its own sake, and a desire to do God's will. Failing, therefore, the other two, there is no reason given by Butler why man should not fall back on this as far as society is concerned; but the tone of Christ's teaching is denunciatory of this line of action as far as the individual is concerned. Indeed, John v. 44 seems to indicate that as regards the highest motive of all, we become incapacitated for it by yielding to the desire for esteem. Lastly, it should be noted that while Butler frequently urges the necessity of controlling all natural affections by reason, the particular instances denounced by Christ are indicative of a pursuit not so much of esteem as of unthinking applause, and that in a particularly shameless and excessive way, totally divorced from any principle except self-gratification. Higher than this is the pleasure which accompanies the esteem shown by men of worth and judgment; but far higher than either is the simple love of duty—which is remarkably ignored in the New Testament—and the childlike desire to do God's will. Christ tells His followers that to forego this higher motive for the lowest, or even the lowest but one, is fatal.

XV

WHEN YE DO ALMS

vi. 2-4

CERTAIN questions of interpretation arise at once out of these verses, and certain others when we come to apply the teaching to ordinary life. 1. The word "do" in v. 2 seems superfluous. Has it any particular force? 2. The revisers in v. 2 change "they have their reward" into "they have received their reward." What time is referred to? 3. Is the saying in v. 3 a proverb or a parable? 4. There is an important difference again in the Revised Version, but a question still remains: With what verb is "in secret" to be joined—"seeth in secret" or "shall recompense thee in secret"? And again, it would be possible to understand the clause "in secret" after the second verb, "which seeth in secret, shall, in secret, recompense thee."

Before considering these, however, we must notice that this is the first of three instances chosen by our Lord of virtuous actions which can be performed in the wrong way—almsgiving, prayer, and fasting—performed by the Pharisees exactly as He had said they should not be, viz., to attract attention. And a clear decision should, if possible, be arrived at whether (a) the same principle of non-publicity applies to all kinds of virtuous action; and (b) how far there is any teaching in the words for men and women of to-day, as

it is obvious in all three cases that the particular form of publicity and display which is here denounced is completely out of fashion at the present time. There would probably be little dispute about either of these points. We may assume that the three instances are for us typical ; that is to say, it is possible that they were chosen because the ostentation of the Pharisees was more manifested in them than in other kinds of action; but that is a question of no importance for us now. It is clear that we must consider the principle in relation to all those of our actions which have any chance of attracting favourable notice, no matter how utterly different may be the methods of display we are tempted to adopt, from those in vogue in Jerusalem in A.D. 30.

(1) "As do the hypocrites in the synagogues and in the streets." It is interesting to observe that the insertion of the word "do" helps to make it plain that the descriptive words "in the synagogue and in the streets" apply only to the "hypocrites" spoken of ; whereas if it were omitted, these words would be ambiguously inserted, and might perfectly well be taken as part of a distinct particular prohibition : "Do not sound a trumpet before thee (metaphorical, of course) in the synagogues and in the streets, as the hypocrites (do there and elsewhere) to get glory from men." But by the insertion of the verb "do" the illustration becomes obviously particular, the prohibition general. The paraphrase would then be : "You have before your eyes a well-known instance of a duty performed designedly to attract attention, in a particular way and in particular places. Thou art not to perform this duty with any such intention." Clearly the *broad* application of the prohibition is much assisted by the insertion of the verb. As far as almsgiving is concerned, it is not a particular

manner but a motive which is forbidden. (2) "They have received." The Greek word seems to mean almost "they go away with their reward," calling up the picture of hirelings walking away after receiving their wages. Or it may mean "they have the proceeds of their conduct, their reward." The point is not important. (3) If the saying about the hands is parabolic, then there would be an opening for some of the strange interpretations which have been forced upon this verse to bring out the difference between the two hands,¹ *e.g.* that the left hand means a man's nearest friend, or even his wife. If it is proverbial, then the sense may well be simply, "let your action be not only secret from others, but, as far as possible, *unconsciously* performed, not thought about afterwards." The difference here is important. (4) "In secret," according to the Greek, seems to mean "in that part of your life which is secret"; and if so, there is no reason why the words should not be joined according to the sound, with the first verb "seeth" leaving the second verb with a certain vague and unlimited force, "shall recompense thee," the time, and manner, and nature of the recompense not being defined.² Indeed,

¹ Vide Zahn, p. 260.

² The Revised Version is open to criticism here. Any ordinary reader of the T. R. would of course connect $\beta\lambda\acute{e}p\omega\nu$ and $\acute{e}v\tau\hat{\omega}\kappa\mu\pi\tau\hat{\omega}$, as the $\acute{e}v\tau\hat{\omega}$ $\phi\alpha\nu\epsilon\rho\hat{\omega}$ make the balance of the sentence perfectly clear. But when these two interpolations are erased, the Revised Version is ambiguous in the English and still more in the Greek; and the ambiguity is due to want of punctuation. That is to say, the reader of the Greek wants to know with which verb $\acute{e}v\tau\hat{\omega}\kappa\rho$ is connected by the Revisers; and owing to there being no comma before or after "in secret" it is not certain what the answer is. And yet in their Preface the Revisers state that they have adopted the "heavier" system of punctuation. Professor Zahn in his Commentary (p. 262) says that if $\beta\lambda\acute{e}p\omega\nu$ is connected with $\acute{e}v\tau\hat{\omega}\kappa\mu\pi\tau\hat{\omega}$ "es ergibt sich der befreindliche Gedanke, dass das Wissen Gottes um alles menschliche Handeln oder irdische Geschehen den Menschen verborgen sei." But this is an unnecessary inference. The same commentator explains $\acute{e}v\tau\hat{\omega}\kappa\rho$ as indicating "den Zustand der

the alternative leaves the verb "seeth" in a very unsatisfactory isolation. "Shall reward thee in secret," sounds as if it were right, but the more closely it is considered the less satisfactory the meaning is, especially as it does not give the antithesis required. If on the other hand the two words are joined with "seeth," the paraphrase of the passage would be something of this kind: "Do your alms so as not to attract attention. Thereby you will make almsgiving a part of your life which is hidden from men; but in that hidden department of life God sees, and though you miss the reward of men's approbation, you will receive a recompense from God."

We find, then, that our Lord after the general admonition concerning the wrong motive of "doing righteousness" selects three examples of virtuous action in which a fashion of vulgar ostentation had grown up among those whom He stigmatises as "hypocrites," and emphatically enjoins upon His followers a contrary course of action in which the performance of the duty would be as far as possible withdrawn from men's sight. Do the words go further than this? Do they forbid us even more subtle seeking for a reward, not from others but from self? It would be possible, if not, to obey the order by giving alms anonymously, and then indulging in self-congratulation, which if unrestrained would cer-

Verborgenheit als den Ort oder Bereich in welchem eine Sache oder Person sich befindet oder ein Handlung sich vollzieht." Now, if God's seeing in one department of life is spoken of, that is not tantamount to saying that there is no "seeing" in any other. Therefore the words "um alles menschliche Handlung" are an over-statement. Secondly, the "seeing" may well be "in secret" as far as mankind generally are concerned, while it is not secret from the individual in question, but part of that commerce between the individual soul and God which not only ought not to be, but cannot be, revealed to others. So the expression "den Menschen verborgen" requires this important qualification.

tainly exercise a baneful effect on the character. This we may take to be forbidden by the proverbial expression "let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." Our virtuous deeds are to be as far as possible unconsciously done ; and where this is not possible they should be forgotten and put out of the mind ; anyhow not dwelt upon or brooded over. Certain modern writers would speak of this as the work of the unconscious or subjective mind. The injunction commends itself at once to our instincts, though the principle on which it rests is obscure, and the violations of it in practice are manifold. As to the principle, there are significant passages in the New Testament which warn us against the habit of brooding on the past. St. Paul's well-known words about "forgetting those things that are behind,"¹ may be taken to include past triumphs quite as certainly as past failures. And the idea that looking backward or thinking of what is gone is to fail in progressing towards the higher life seems to be in some sense akin to the idea of evolution. The thought, however, in this verse is narrower, and would be more correctly expressed by the term *simplicity* in giving. By this is meant giving with one motive only, viz. the benefit of the recipient, which motive is in no way confused if the idea of service to God be added. It is worth noticing that this meaning depends on the proverbial saying being

¹ The expression *τὰ διπλῶ* is strikingly used in Luke ix. 62, John vi. 66, to denote the things of this world. It is difficult to exaggerate the emphasis with which Christ's teaching dwells on the present. In this verse He discourages dwelling in thought on the past. In verse 31 on the future. Compare, however, the saying of Sir J. Paget that a surgeon ought to remember his failures. This is only in appearance contradictory to the line taken in the New Testament. Painful experiences in the past should be remembered not only as a corrective to self-congratulation but strictly for help in subsequent conduct of life.

a proverb and not a parable, unless the left hand is interpreted as the mind, which is very improbable. The saying has the appearance of a colloquialism, meaning not only a manner of giving which would be unobserved by others but free from the least admixture of self-interest or *arrière pensée* of any kind. But if the single motive be the benefit of the recipient, it is clear that careful deliberation, which is urgently required in all charitable action in modern life, is not excluded.

Such is the principle which so rests on deep laws of our being as to forbid any clear exposition of its meaning. But it is not difficult to see how terribly it is violated every day. Those of us who in conversation let out any little fact as to some kindness shown to a neighbour are guilty of disobedience to Christ's command. The action may have been quite sincere, but the savour of it is spoilt by self-congratulation. To many this temptation is well-nigh irresistible. And it is probable, that for a certain number who cannot help revealing the morbid infection of their thoughts, there are very many more who forbear to speak arrogantly of their creditable actions, because they aim at gaining credit from their neighbours. In other words, the sin of self-congratulation must be far commoner than open self-laudation, or vulgar display, because it is shielded from rebuke and ridicule so long as it is controlled by a certain amount of prudential self-restraint; so that it may be supposed that there is less difference in the egoism of individuals than in their manners. It should be noted, however, that this subject is properly only collateral to the thought of our text. A difficult question more germane to it is that of the degree to which publicity in philanthropic action is required, and how far concealment is to be regarded as the

rule, and what exceptions there are to it. In other words, we have to balance this text by the words, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

There is no sort of collision between the two utterances, inasmuch as the best way in the long run of letting the light of his character shine before men is for a Christian to fulfil the later injunction, and let his philanthropy be governed by the spirit of charity to all. The distinction is made clear by the motives, one being indicated as selfish, the other as aiming at God's glory. Yet the earlier text may be a corrective of the later to a certain extent; for while one would prompt entire concealment in well-doing, there is a certain obligation resting on us to set a good example.

It is probable that a right-minded man would have little difficulty in this and similar questions, and that there is sound wisdom in the text (quoted by Butler), Eccles. xxxii. 23: "In every good work trust thy own soul; for this is the keeping of the commandment." It is quite certain, moreover, that in all questions of conduct where duties seem to clash and every course to be beset with some objection, people would gain enormously in serenity of spirit if they would deliberately set themselves to realise that, having done their best to see what is the right thing to do, for them all subsequent anxiety, repining, or hesitation, is of the nature of sin.

"And thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall recompense thee." It is not difficult to see the idea which led to the insertion of the word "openly." It refers to the judgment day; and the word "Himself," also inserted, is probably due to a pious feeling of God filling up the gap caused by man failing to

recognise the righteousness enjoined. Yet the rejection of these words is a gain. It fixes our attention on the recompense, without intruding the notion of a particular time, and so leads us to think of the main suggestion of the word, the difference between the reward taken away by the hypocrites and that received by the obedient disciple of Christ. A new characteristic of the "hypocrite" emerges here. He is a person to whom unthinking, silly applause is pleasant, while to a high-minded, right-thinking man it is abhorrent and profoundly humiliating, especially if it is given to him for work which is manifestly directed to God. Thus to be belauded for praying earnestly would excite more disgust in such a man than if he were publicly thanked for a munificent charitable gift; but the "hypocrite" looks on both as a "reward." They constitute the thing he has worked for. So strongly does he feel that recognition, publicity, fame, or even notoriety, are ends in themselves, purely and simply desirable, no matter how shockingly incongruous is the foolish, noisy admiration of ignorant men, with humble service rendered to the Infinite God; service which is not only demanded of us in simple gratitude, but is beyond anything essential to our own soul's health. It is in the light of the principle on which our Lord's words are based, that a man like Keble could speak of the praise of men as a humiliation and a trial. For ordinary persons who find it difficult to rise to such a height of feeling it would be most salutary if they would give their minds attentively to our Lord's scathing words about hypocrites, and then remember that this is a prominent and perhaps essential symptom of hypocrisy, so to lose all sense of the true meaning of service as to feel that the hollow and fleeting verdicts of men are "their reward."

It is exceedingly important to observe also that the teaching already given about *unconsciousness* in deeds of charity and kindness re-appears in the triple use of the expression "Your Father in heaven," instead of simply "God." That is to say, the words remind us that we are being taught here as children, and how to behave according to what is due from children. Unconsciousness is one of the most beautiful characteristics of healthy childhood, but in again and again insisting upon it, how severe and exacting is the teaching of Christ! If any ordinary teacher were to tell people to do good unconsciously, or even with simplicity, the exhortation would be thought to be useless. Man cannot change his nature, and the aiming at unconsciousness in action is fraught with failure from the outset. Why, then, is it that the same teaching from Christ is received with all reverence? The difference is that His own example was flawless, and the whole occasion of the teaching was conditioned by the fact that the Divine Spirit was soon going to be given to men. Without these two facts, not even from our Lord, not even when couched in words of matchless power, would the teaching on this and many other subjects have been anything better than a claim hopelessly remote from man's power to fulfil.

"Shall recompense thee": literally, "make a return to thee for what thou hast lost," viz. men's attention and applause. The promise is immensely the richer for being undefined. As it stands, it suggests by its very reticence the infinite bounty of God. The Christian has actively to shun publicity and display in his deeds of kindness, and at first may well feel the want of recognition and the silence of the onlookers, especially when they have been full of expectation of something out of the common. But

he may repeat to himself the words chosen with a kind of ironical understatement, as if a bare compensation for a loss were all that the Son of God could hold out to His followers ; the truth, nevertheless, being that what is promised, so far from being adequately described in this reserved but pregnant word, is spoken of elsewhere by one of those who were the first to test the truth of the divine encouragement in the well-known outburst of gratitude, "Eye hath not seen nor hath ear heard."

XVI

THE HYPOCRITES AT PRAYER

vi. 5

THE picture here drawn by Christ of the behaviour of “the hypocrites” demands close attention, as giving a startling exposure of the depths of self-deceit into which human nature is capable of falling. It is a picture drawn in the soberest colours, without comment or adjective, but with a compelling power due to the selection of facts. Prayer offered by the individual to God is wholly without meaning unless distractions are kept from the mind. Our experience testifies to this. Nothing is so difficult as to secure the mind from distracting thoughts during prayer, but no one tries to pray without trying to do this difficult and discouraging thing all the time, evidently under the conviction that thoughts which interrupt the communion with God utterly destroy prayer ; and if men fail in keeping free from distractions, sooner or later they cease to try to pray. But these men in Jerusalem and elsewhere put themselves to much inconvenience to be distracted as much as possible while they prayed. They chose certain places, not because they were quiet, but because they were crowded ; and they made it impossible for their minds to be fixed on God, because they purposely turned their thoughts throughout on man. Their object was to hear expressions of admiration from the onlookers ;

if they heard them they attended to them ; if they did not hear them still they listened for them. Again, the section of the public who could have bestowed admiration on such conduct must have been the most foolish and ignorant. Thus human beings, fully conscious of their relation to the unseen Author of their being and the Creator of all things, somehow persuaded themselves that it was worth much trouble to gain credit from the dregs of the populace for praying under conditions which made prayer impossible. Never has man been the victim of a more pitiable hallucination !

Again, we note that there is nothing about man more real than his almost unquenchable instinct of prayer to God. Experience shows that our spiritual vitality depends on it. No one can quite explain why, but countless voices have testified to the unmistakably strengthening effects of earnest prayer. But these men bartered this priceless heritage to secure that which, by the unanimous verdict of all, is the most unreal, the most fleeting and unmeaning thing, as well as the most mischievous if it be welcomed and listened to, namely, the applause of ignorant, vulgar, and foolish people. Volumes of books have been written to prove how fame of this sort is a hollow and deceptive phantom, utterly useless and unreal ; and to grasp this, as they thought, these men used, and in using destroyed, the most godlike faculty with which man is endowed—his power of communion with the Most High. It is that which gives man his decisive primacy among created things, and the awfulness of the picture consists in its record that man has been able to degrade the very noblest part of his complex being in the attempt to lay hold of a contemptible shadow. This, again, is behaviour stigmatised as hypocrisy ; and we have to add to the notions of a hypocrite, already

given us in the great Sermon, this particular trait—he makes use of what is most sacred and lofty, in men's conceptions and feelings, for purposes utterly mundane, and, moreover, inconsistent with what he acknowledges to be his own deepest convictions. This feature in the hypocrite's character is to be correlated with others. Meantime, it is probable that this kind of self-satisfied unconscious waste of life is the outcome of Satan's most deadly work. It is a triumph for him as the deceiver of mankind, and, moreover, a profound mystery. Other failures tell of something good in itself perverted or running riot from want of control. But this denotes a corruption in the very centre of man's being, by which the noblest part of him is distorted and ruined, while he strives for the possession of a thing of naught.

There is a singular reserve in the Saviour's simple words, which may be thus modernised : "When ye pray ye shall not be as the actors who like to pray standing in crowded places, that they may be seen of men." The absence of all condemnatory terms is striking, but the picture is given in just enough detail to show the full depravity of the hypocritical spirit. It is as if some actions are so bad that they only require to be stated in order to ensure condemnation. And yet this particular action was admired by the common run of people in Jerusalem.¹

¹ It is hardly necessary to explain that, even taken quite literally, this passage does not disown public worship, though, of course, it is quite possible to go to church in order to gain credit from others. But if some commonly received opinions about public worship were sincerely and deeply held, there might easily be a great confusion. It is sometimes thought that people gather together in church in order to add weight and force to their petitions. This is the selfish view of prayer, difficult to uproot. And many who shrink from putting it thus clearly to themselves openly avow that the sermon is the principal attraction, or not unfrequently the principal deterrent. It is, in short, lamentably easy to mistake altogether the meaning and purpose of going to church. Worship is not the wringing

of favours from God by stress of petition, but the common expression of our best common feelings—hopes, needs, and aspirations ; and we gather together largely to assist each other, since many of these emotions can hardly be expressed in solitude. Other emotions require exercise, but also restraint, both of which are given by co-operation. So much concerns the Godward aspect of worship. Towards each other we need constant reminders of our solidarity in respect of *all* our highest interests or faculties. Many of these are directly fostered by well-ordered public worship. All that is artistic ; the taste for painting, sculpture, architecture, and music should be stimulated and consecrated ; our instinct for history should be gratified by the ancient prayers in which we join, as well as by the lessons read ; and no linguistic taste is so fastidious as to fail of satisfaction in the words of our Liturgy. Our services, in short, are artistic and archæological ; what they apparently, but only apparently, lack is modernism. But to show the true modern application of the venerable words which we either listen to or repeat is the function of the sermon. Prayer is only a small part of public worship, and, of course, is only social in tone.

XVII

THE BELIEVERS AT PRAYER

vi. 6

AFTER thus cautioning His hearers against the wrong motive, our Lord warns them against the wrong manner of praying ; the first was ascribed to "the hypocrites," the next to "the Gentiles," and it is described in the difficult phrase translated, "Use not vain repetitions." Scholars have given many different renderings.¹ The verb may mean to repeat solemn grand words without thinking, or meaningless trivial words ; or merely to make sounds without minding what they mean, or whether they mean anything. But whatever be the derivation of the word, the bearing of it is indicated by the next phrase, "They think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." Men had got into a way of believing that there was some merit in *mere words*, and so the more of them the better. This, as so stated, seems at first to denote an insane travesty of prayer. But it is enormously

¹ "Enter into thine inner chamber." St. Augustine has some lofty thoughts on these words, as if they applied to men communing with their own hearts, and he asks why this is distasteful to many, suggesting the answer that the corruption of the heart makes it unpleasant to retire to. This, doubtless, would be so in some cases, but the difficulty which many good people find in solitary meditation arises from inability to concentrate the thoughts and from lack of imagination. But the subject does not properly belong at all to this text, and it is a good instance of a needless figurative interpretation.

common. Not to go beyond the confines of our own religious communion, wherever any one attends public worship without honestly exercising his mental faculties, or carelessly repeats a form of words in private, he is acting as if there were some merit in sound of words, or in repetition apart from the mind. And what are we to say of the very common practice of inaudible reading in church, or of reading which is so mannered as wholly to disguise the meaning of the words? Bad reading aloud is a peculiarly English fault, and to it may be attributed some of the distaste for public worship which prevails among educated people. The time comes when an utter waste of the effort of listening becomes, to many minds, unbearable.

It would be well if we thought oftener of the immeasurable wonder of language in connexion with this subject. Every word is in itself a record of man's mental history. When it first took shape it witnessed to the birth of a new idea or a new fact, and as it continued to live it gathered numberless subtle associations from other words with which it was blended, from the experience of men which evoked its use, or from the way their lips fashioned the sound of it. So all words register, from their own special cluster of associations, and in varying degree, the changes in human thought and knowledge, and if they are now in use they continually change according to the way we treat them, which again depends on what we think about them and how we pronounce them. Therefore, whether we will or no, by speaking everybody influences to some slight extent the nature of this most wonderful fact in man's life—language; each person passes on to posterity a group of words for their use which he has slightly modified, not by studied effort or of

set purpose at all, but by simply living and talking to his fellow-men. If we have done anything to deprave language, we have made life a little harder for our descendants, a little less likely to give them day by day the uplifting influence of hearing clean words clearly and wholesomely chosen and uttered. And so there is a responsibility resting on us all in respect of the use of ordinary words.

But how much more in the matter of prayer ? A great prayer which has been transmitted to us by our forefathers is vastly more than a chance collection of sounds or symbols ; it is the expression of the highest moments of a holy life lived on earth, concentrated into a few lines of printed matter, but the outcome of his best experience in the noblest activity of which a human being is capable, viz. communing with God ; and so it is the ultimate translation, intelligible to us, of things which cannot be uttered. This definition would include both poetry and music, but that is no indictment against it, since the finest forms of prayer embrace both. There is that in the collects of our Prayer Book which can only be called a blending of poetry and music in perfect English prose, so that even the sound of the words and their matchless rhythm suggest to us thoughts which are not of earth. But we are not to rest content with the sound. That is exactly the state of mind about prayer which is positively and clearly forbidden by this text, "Use not vain repetitions." If the sound of the words has something glorious about it, yet we are not to suppose that the repetition of the sounds has anything in it acceptable to God. That is the plainest meaning of the prohibition against using words without giving the mind to their signification, the practice which might be designated by the Anglicised form of the Greek word, battalogy.

We are also cautioned against supposing that prayer

to be acceptable must necessarily be long continued. But, on the other hand, shortness by itself is not a merit, though in modern times it is difficult not to think so. Our stately Liturgy is the outcome of a vigorous process of curtailment and excision ; and there is an inclination constantly operative towards a still further shortening as life becomes more and more restless. But first we had better see clearly what this prohibition means. When we offer petitions to a human being there are good reasons for relying on urgent reiteration of the request. Men's power of saying "No" can often be beaten down by persistency, independently of the reasonableness of the petition ; a characteristic of humanity recognised in the parable of the Unjust Judge. Why, then, are we not to transfer to our prayers the practice of persevering enumeration of our wants ? The answer is given in the following saying, which at once alters our whole conception of prayer in the sense of petition for favours : "For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask Him."¹

Many readers must have felt a certain disappointment that our Lord does not apparently recognise the exceedingly common difficulty of praying, namely, wandering thoughts. In short, among men and women of the present day there is a vast proportion who are beset either with this difficulty, or with another which at first sight is far different, viz. the quasi-scientific idea that the course of nature is uniform, that everything, even a spiritual phenomenon, has its cause, and therefore what is to be will be. But different though these two difficulties seem to be, they lead practically to the same result ; people in large numbers leave off praying at all, unless a perfunctory attendance at the

¹ The logical question which arises from this will be considered in the next section, p. 238.

worship of the congregation could be called by that name.

But it will be found that the two prohibitions with which the Lord's Prayer is introduced do in reality recognise these very difficulties. The first, which in its English shape might be called "Battalogy," is not the feeling of a tendency to wandering thoughts, still less perseverance in wrestling with them, but *acquiescence* in mental heedlessness during prayer; in short, the succumbing to one of the deadliest temptations of humanity—spiritual sloth. The innermost vice of "vain repetitions" is not the repetitions, but their vanity, which is due to their lifelessness, the absence of all living action of the mind. Repetition in prayer may be harmless or even necessary; and we should hesitate to say that our Lord never repeated a petition during the long nights which He spent praying. Thus we are forbidden to give in to mental and spiritual sloth while at prayer. "We must not be stupider than we can help,"¹ neither must we dream of praying without effort. There Christ leaves the subject, probably because, however common and distressing may be the infirmity of wandering thoughts or cold-heartedness, it is exceedingly simple both to understand and to deal with. It requires only the application of common-sense for us to see that we know enough to be able to overcome the weakness by degrees, and there is nothing to wonder at in Christ's not following out a subject which is well within the scope of our own minds. The difficulty, in short, *solvitur ambulando*: as Archbishop Temple used to say, "Is it impossible? then make it possible by doing it." No revelation from God is needed for this purpose. We require simply (1) to pray for help before beginning; (2) to grasp the principles of prayer as

¹ Canon Moberley, quoted in *Church Quarterly*, May 1904.

taught in the Lord's Prayer ; (3) the discipline of practice ; (4) patience with the slowness of our progress ; (5) perseverance ; (6) to recognise that wrestling effort is an inherent characteristic of prayer in the Bible, from Gen. xxxii. 36 (Jacob and the Angel) to the word "strive," Eph. vi. 18 ; and Rev. vi. 10 ; (7) to remember that genuine dissatisfaction in such a matter is a sign of life, and common to all prayerful people ; (8) certainty of conviction that the promises attached to earnest effort in prayer will not fail (xvi. 24, and reff.).

XVIII

THE LORD'S PRAYER

vi. 9

THERE has been much discussion and much divergence of opinion on the question whether the Pater Noster is in its right place in our Gospel or in Luke xi. 2. Some scholars maintain that our Lord must have delivered it twice, a theory which others denounce as if it were a kind of subterfuge, though plainly there is much to be said in its support, and it is impossible to disprove. For the benefit of those who decide such questions on authority, it may be stated that the majority of modern scholars regard the Matthean form of words as the more authentic, not the Lukan setting, the idea being that St. Luke altered certain phrases, which were Jewish in their character, to suit his Gentile readers.

No one could well dispute the possibility of this; but the question sinks into unimportance compared with the statement handed down by both Evangelists that the Saviour gave His followers a model prayer. It is advisable, therefore, to consider the purport and significance of this independently, first, of the critical question, the reason being that we crave guidance as to the thorny problem noticed by our Lord in Matt. vi. 8, viz. that God knows what things we have need of before we ask Him. Why, then, pray at all? Secondly, there is the interesting theory that in the passage before us the instruction runs: "After this

manner therefore pray ye," *i.e.* betokening that Christ gave to the Apostles not a form of words to be strictly adhered to, but a model prayer, on the broad principles of which all other prayers were to be based. It is possible to hold that this theory is necessary as a defence against the charge of our uttering "vain repetitions" if we repeat the prayer as a form of words, and the question may easily be viewed according to the preference felt for liturgical or extemporary prayer in church services.

The former of these two questions is familiar to all who have thought on our relation to God. Logically it is impossible to explain why a creature should petition his Creator if he sincerely believes that the Creator not only knows all his wants, but will certainly satisfy them as far as his spiritual interests allow. But we soon penetrate into a region where logic fails to guide us. Who can justify logically the spontaneous petition of a child to his earthly father? We believe that the father knows and is ready to meet every need of his child. None the less, if the child were induced by any means, either by knowing his father's general feeling or from a cowering fear, to hold his tongue and never utter any of his wants, we should agree that the relation between the two was unnatural. Moreover, in such a matter a wise agnosticism is needed. It is impossible to define the effect of mind upon mind. An earthly father might well be justified in withholding gifts from a child who, after being told to bring his wants to his father, refused to do so; and it is idle to argue that the son's needs are the same, whether he utters them or not, and that God does not require to be informed of our needs as an earthly father does. Such pleas ignore the fact that what is at stake is not the satisfaction of certain wants, but the deep personal relation between finite beings and the infinite God,

which relation is helped or hindered according as we approach Him freely and naturally, and there is no such thing conceivable as a free and natural approach to the heavenly Father by His children, which does not partly consist of a spontaneous utterance of whatever need presses most at the moment. Again, the fitness of the creature to receive is affected by his uttering or keeping silence about his wants. No one who has done his best to pray will dispute St. Augustine's assertion, that without our asking our capacity for receiving is unequal to the task; asking enlarges it, and this must be one of the senses underlying the words, "Ask, and ye shall receive." There is, in short, some danger of our falling into a mechanical way of conceiving of our relation to God, which certainly ought to be corrected by reflection on human relationships. And nothing could be more distinct than the insisting on this analogy by our Lord. His very use of the terms "Father" and "Children" is a lesson to us to transfer all that is highest in our notions of the human family to the relation in which we stand to God. And even if this were not so, He treats the logical difficulty as of no account whatever, not by answering it, but by forcing it on the listeners' attention by the juxtaposition of vi. 8 with the requests for gifts contained in the Pater Noster. And the requests contained in the prayer are exactly those which, being for fundamental necessities, God knows our need of without our telling Him. No teaching could more decisively refuse to notice the logical difficulty than this. And that is not because the difficulty has become more acute than it was then, owing to the advance of science or from any other cause, but simply because it has always been formidable only by taking account of a small proportion of the facts of the case.

The second question—whether the Saviour here

gave a form of words to be used, or only a model prayer, the principles of which were to be followed though the words might be departed from—is less important than might be supposed, and probably will always remain uncertain. The facts are that in the Lukian tradition (xi. 2) Christ is reported as giving a form of words : “When ye pray, say . . .” In the passage before us the words are less definite : “After this manner therefore pray ye.”¹ Supposing—what is not certain—that this is an instruction only to imitate the prayer, not to use the actual words, we still have to reckon with the Lukian tradition ; and that, again, depends on whether we accept the theory that the insertion of the Lord’s Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount is due to the compilers ; or whether, on the other hand, it really was part of the Sermon, and that the tradition followed by St. Luke was erroneous ; or, thirdly, whether Christ dictated the words twice. We can hardly be wrong in thinking that, no matter what diligence is expended on ransacking of evidence ; whatever answer is given by individual scholars to these questions, there will be for many years to come divergency of opinion ; also that personal predilections, associations of childhood, and peculiarities of temperament are bound to influence the decision to an even greater extent than usual. For whereas apparently little hangs on the question whether the words of the prayer were given once or twice, yet much controversy has been stirred by the difference between extemporary prayer and prayer according to a set form of words. Further, even if it could be proved that the Matthean tradition was authentic, there is no possibility that this would alter the practice of millions of Christians who have used the words of the Pater Noster, from childhood

¹ So Zahn, but cf. Alford *in loc.*

onwards, in public and private prayer. Still less that Christians would so modify the education of their children as to abandon the set form, and train them only to pray according to the principles indicated in the model prayer. In other words, even though criticism should ultimately achieve full success in proving that the Matthean form is nearer to what we may suppose Christ originally said, yet there would be no warrant for our departing from present practice in education; and that would constitute a strong reason for our continuing ourselves as adults to do as we have always done, since whatever may be the objections to a set form, there is no reason to suppose that they are not to be met by a little reflection, vigilance, and effort of will. But as we are an immense distance from certainty as to what our Lord actually did say in introducing the Pater Noster, it is difficult not to infer provisionally that, with His knowledge of man's tendency to formalism, if He had wished to warn His followers definitely against using a set form of words, He would have made the matter clearer than by simply saying, "After this manner therefore pray ye." Any one could have foreseen, what has actually occurred, that with such a very light, almost imperceptible, warning to reckon with, man would allow himself with a feeling of relief to fall back on the set form as delivered by divine authority.

If this conclusion seems to some minds illiberal and antiquated, it is well to put clearly the alternative. Supposing it granted that any form of words is a fettering of the human spirit in its intercourse with the divine, then surely even an indication of the principles of prayer is a fettering, though possibly in a less degree. Why did not Christ leave us without a hint or suggestion? The safest answer to return to His followers (Luke xi. 1) would have been to the effect

that they could trust their own spiritual aspirations to lead them right ; that the intercourse of a finite being with the Infinite is best left to its own inner stimulus, so as to be a kind of emotion-exercise acting in ways not to be translated in speech at all, just as at the present day there are many who profess a conviction, that for them the best way of praying is to deliver themselves to the influences of natural scenery or art, to commune with nature in solitude and passivity, through the medium of fair sights or sounds, landscapes, pictures, or music. But Christ certainly acted on a contrary assumption in regard to prayer. According to our authorities, He anyhow gave His countenance to the idea that prayer has to do with words and has principles of its own, and takes the form of definite requests, and thus has to be distinguished from vague inarticulate communings, however beneficial these may be to the spirit harassed by worldly cares. There is no reason why such emotion-exercises should be called prayer because they meet certain modern needs of educated men ; nor why, if they meet certain needs, they should be supposed to meet the same needs as prayer, and in a better way.

We have, in short, a scale of spiritual processes, which may be distinguished thus : (1) Prayer in a set form of words ; (2) Prayer with words not prescribed ; (3) Vague communings with nature or art ; (4) Various forms of weak spiritual activity, fading away into nothing at all. At what point in this scale does prayer cease to be prayer ? The answer is : Where it passes from being regulated petition to being unregulated expression or exercise of emotion, *i.e.* somewhere at the beginnings of (3). We say "regulated," because when prayer is most truly deserving of the name it conforms to the grand principles taught by the enunciation of the Pater Noster ; to this, in par-

ticular—that desire for God's glory is to take precedence of the desire for the satisfaction of man's need. In other words, prayer must have its centre, not in man's self but in God ; and if it departs altogether from this principle it can only be called prayer by a sort of figure of speech. Again, as to its being necessarily offered in words either spoken aloud or thought, it has often been said that prayer in some cases rises above all forms of words into an intercourse too deep for utterance. This is no doubt true. But there should be no difficulty in distinguishing this from (3). When prayer thus rises above words it is due, not to its vagueness, but to its intensity ; not to its impersonal character, but to its being directed with ever-deeper consciousness to One who is a Person ; and before it reaches this stage it is in actual experience almost sure to consist and be bound up with words. Christ deals with it, then, in the earlier stage in which men commonly conceive of it, and not with such forms of spiritual activity as are classed under the term religious meditation, or with any passive reception of spiritual influences. And if we are inclined to regret that He did not teach the value of unfettered communings with God wholly apart from words, it is well to remember that the degree in which words hamper spiritual activity depends on their character. If they express deep and universal truths, instantly recognised by the human mind everywhere, there is nothing in them to fetter our spirits, since we only gain from them guidance, which is a very different thing from hindrance. It is probable that experiences in such matters differ ; but there must be many to whom familiar forms of words, in congregational praying at all events, are free from one serious objection to which extemporary or novel words are exposed—that is, they do not excite the mind to think

on what may be coming next, but leave all the energies unimpeded to concentrate on the act of personal communion with an unseen Being.

THE MAIN IDEA OF THE LORD'S PRAYER.

There can be very little question that the structure of this prayer is designed to teach a deep and distinct principle, viz. that the glory of God is to take precedence of the welfare of man. Students of the prayer from time immemorial have agreed upon this. The opening petitions refer to God, asking that His name (man's idea of His attributes) may be hallowed, that His kingdom may come, and His will be done ; all this on earth as in heaven. Then the thought passes on to man as the agent in bringing this about. If God's will is to be done on earth it must be by men, therefore man prays for his necessities ; unless these are supplied he can do nothing. Such is the deep and simple idea which links together the various clauses of the prayer.

But when we come to put clearly before ourselves the principle that God's glory is to take precedence of man's need—in other words, of service to him—we are at once confronted with a difficulty. To a vast number of minds the distinction is not clear, or if it is fairly clear it is unacceptable. This point requires careful treatment.

It might be contended by a large majority of professing Christians of our day, that a life devoted to the service of man satisfies all just requirements. It is capable of infinite self-denial ; it recognises the one certain spiritual fact which may be called universal, namely, the voice of conscience ; and it is with a feeling of no little relief that the modern Western European, tossed with conflicting rumours about the unsettlement

of old beliefs, the results of the latest research, the discovery of alien mythical influences on early Christian belief, and so on, turns to making his life one of continuous service to his fellow-men ; to the raising of their ideas, the improvement of their surroundings, the bettering of their education, and so forth. Such a *summum bonum* is well adapted to the practical restless spirit of the world of our day. It is often spoken of as practical Christianity, and its votaries recognise that in a sense it may be called "morality tinged with emotion," or, better perhaps, "faith working by love" ; for it soon becomes plain that mere practical efforts to help others are of no use unless the spirit in which they are made is quickened with true charity. And in the opinion of such people the attempt to realise the primary importance of the claims of God's glory is unprofitable for many who may truly be called followers of Christ ; and if unprofitable, then also weakening to the moral fibre and a hindrance to progress. It is so easy to talk about these deep principles and end by ignoring others which lie far nearer to our daily life, and so by doing nothing of any value to any one. Surely goodness must show itself in action, in its fruits ; and if so, then the more persistent is the striving after results and the more devoted the life of practical service, the better.

Such a creed as this is compatible, of course, with recognition that the sense of God's presence and of hourly dependence on Him is a beautiful gift, and that thanksgiving is due from those who can say they have received it in any perceptible measure, but that meantime the life of "practical religion" must not be rated as of less value or dignity. Indeed, there is a great deal to be said in its favour by comparison with the other ; it lacks the highest kind of inspiration perhaps, but it aims high and not unfrequently

achieves its ideal. It is uncontentious and unassuming ; and though there is in them less of the motive-power of enthusiasm, the practical Christians claim that they accomplish a work so valuable that much of the truest progress of civilisation depends on it, and that if all good men were of the religiously enthusiastic sort, the world would be a far inferior place to live in ; man would have a far feebler grip on the resources of nature, and far more of our time would be spent in strife.

This view of religion is too widely held to be put on one side simply as unscriptural, or unorthodox, or untrue. To judge as far as we can from spoken or written words, it is the guiding principle of many beautiful lives. This, however, is not the place for an adequate discussion of it. But it is important to remark that such a view of life and duty is in flat opposition to the teaching of the Lord's Prayer. It is, of course, the view of religion which is called naturalistic, and assumes that the fact of conscience is all that man need accept as a guide to conduct, and that as to conduct, the relation of men to each other is all that really matters. But obviously the Lord's Prayer places first that which naturalism places nowhere, such subjects as our idea of God, our conception of His power and love, the spread of His acknowledged sovereignty on earth ; while of man's relation to his fellow-men nothing is said except in the very striking pendent to the petition for forgiveness towards the end of the prayer. As many of those who profess to be "naturalists" in religion profess also to be warm admirers of the Lord's Prayer, it is plain that there is here some confusion of thought.

The truth is that while nothing is gained by trying to show that naturalism is defective, a great deal is to be

gained by realising that even in its simplest statement it assumes facts about our relation to God which, so to speak, more than justify the doctrine of the Lord's Prayer. For in affirming that the principle of service to others is sufficient in itself, it assumes that the server is somehow inspired with an idea of good *which need not be questioned*. And the more he declines to discuss what this idea is and whence it came, the more honour he pays to it as a beacon light of his life, however much there may be of defect and risk involved in his stopping short at this point ; that is to say, he is ordering his life according to a creed which, though he may never put it into words, starts with a magnificent affirmation : " I believe that I and others are endowed with a craving for what is good, and with a power of attaining to it more and more in my own life, and of introducing it more and more into the lives of others."

If this is so, then praise is due to some one, unless it be supposed that the source of this " unspeakable gift " is a lifeless thing, which few " naturalists " would have the hardihood to aver. And if praise is thus due to a Being, the " naturalist " concedes the essential doctrine of the Lord's Prayer, since he who is led by his convictions to praise a beneficent Being must also wish others to praise Him too ; and this is the desire expressed in the leading petitions of the Prayer. Can life lead to anything better than the raising among men of the idea of such a Being (this is God's glory), or than so working as to manifest daily and hourly His heavenly sway over our thoughts, words, and deeds ?

Reflection therefore seems to show that in spite of the too lowly professions of its votaries the " religion of duty " is no such bald and barren thing as is often supposed ; and this, not because its acknowledged

scope is ample, or that its denials have any value in them, but because its root assumptions are, often unconsciously, in agreement with the principles of the Lord's Prayer ; that is to say, they postulate as a governing fact in human life a certain illumination of man's spirit from some source of life and light, marvellous in its power and permanence, which moves those who recognise it to love and praise and deeds of thanksgiving.

THE TWO DIVISIONS OF THE PRAYER.

It is easy to see that the first three petitions concern God's glory ; the last four man's fundamental needs. But there is a deep significance in the fact of the first group being enjoined upon man at all.

What is the meaning of God's glory ? Perhaps the simplest answer is to be found in the petitions themselves. The first asks that God, as revealed among men, may be honoured and revered ; that man's idea of His attributes may be high and holy. The second is a prayer that among mankind God's sovereignty may be perceived and known so that righteousness, peace, and love, and other characteristics of His sway, may spread among the human community who would own His dominion. The third asks that what God wills may be fulfilled in man's conduct. Thus those whom God created are to ask Him to further among themselves (1) reverence for His revealed attributes ; (2) spread of His sway ; (3) accomplishment of His will. All these together teach us what is meant by the glory of God.

Now when our Lord told His disciples to pray for these things it was tantamount to His telling them that what man conceives of as objects, so to speak, set before God in the fact of His having created the

world, and especially man, are objects which are to be attained by man's co-operating with his Creator ; but that the success of this co-operation depends on God, though, as far as we can tell, man's endeavour is essential to it. This underlying idea, which contains one of the great contradictions involved in the relation of the finite to the infinite, suggests also that the grand object of Creation, viz. the progressive realisation of the Creator among the created, is to be achieved through resistance ; also that the first essential is that God shall be appealed to to overcome it. The great paradox may be expressed in many other ways ; but this is enough to indicate the incomparable depth and immeasurable scope of these opening words, which reveal to us at once the mighty fact that God has created us men with wills free to resist Him, and that this freedom is respected by Him. For instance, when we ask that God's will may be done on earth as in heaven, we remember that it is by us men that it has to be done ; God does not accomplish His own will without us. That is wonderful enough, but the petition further implies that this agency on man's part is impossible for man unless God gives him the necessary power ; otherwise, the petition would be wholly superfluous. With the utmost simplicity therefore and distinctness the opening of the prayer enlightens man as to the unutterable grandeur of his vocation, the dignity of the bare fact of his existence as a created being, and we feel as we consider the purport of the words that in the contradictions which our limited understandings can discern lies not a disproof but rather a guarantee of truth.

"THY KINGDOM COME."

These words clearly point out to man his true vocation. Whatever we do in life, the forwarding of their fulfilment is to be our grand aim, and it may be in part attained if we realise that the best way of manifesting the power of God, His supremacy in our lives, and the victoriousness of His influence, is by showing the sufficiency of His dominion when it is unmixed with worldly support of any kind. In other words, just when religion is most difficult is the time when it reveals the power of the Divine grace. Such supports to goodness as sound health and a happy disposition, friends and a competence, and the like, may help to keep us in the right way, but they make it practically impossible for us to show how the highest life needs God alone for its support, and its enriching. As long as we are compassed about with this world's goods—and many are so compassed who cannot help it—there is less opportunity for extending the acknowledgment of God's sovereignty in matters of daily life than if we were in want. People have little difficulty in recognising in a kind of theoretical fashion how God rules the world through the great movements in history, the shock of nations, the settlements of the great families of the earth, and the larger issues of man's activity. But what nearly everybody craves for is some little evidence of the reality of His kingdom in daily life, among its obscure commonplace experiences. If the Kingdom is not there, it is of little use indeed to have its march traced for us in the career of Charlemagne, or the preparation of Greek philosophy for St. Paul's teaching, or the discovery of the New World; because there is so much difficulty in seeing how "the trivial round, the common task, will furnish all we need to ask." Indeed, they furnish

nothing unless they are lit with something of a light that is not of this world. They seem to testify often of nothing but men's power of enduring routine. How different would things be if those whose lives are maimed and poor, bereft of nearly all that kindles enthusiasm or wins love, would remind themselves daily that to their keeping especially is committed the task of spreading God's kingdom, since they have received the first great equipment for the work, namely, by being disengaged of fictitious helps and supports, so that their onward progress can be seen to be due to nothing but the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit. And this takes place just when life is most bewildering and apparently hopeless ; then they have it within their reach to bear witness to the reality of God's kingdom in daily life.

It is easy, of course, to frame recommendations for those who are stripped of all life's joys ; but Christ was not heartless. In giving us this petition to offer, He gave us the clue to the great problem. There should be nothing to prevent our fixing our minds intently on the prayer from early days onwards, "or ever the silver cord be loosed," so that when the distress comes we shall not require to turn our faces to a new quarter of the heavens, but simply to fix our eyes more steadily on the light that has all along been the "master light of all our seeing." However much the serenity of sufferers may be ascribed by others to a special endowment, it remains true that we might all of us prepare ourselves long before the day of trial by taking into our souls this deep and simple principle, that the truest ambassadors of Christ on earth are those who, in the collapse of worldly hopes, let others see the strength of their trust in Him ; and also that if we can thus fulfil our embassage to our fellow-men, we are fulfilling all that which we were sent into the world to do.

Having now gained some idea of the meaning of the opening clauses, we next discover that in the fourth petition we rather abruptly pass to the subject of men's needs considered without immediate reference to God's glory; though, of course, the underlying suggestion is that if the accomplishment of the will of the Most High is in any way entrusted to us men, it must plainly be our duty to ask that certain necessities of spiritual and physical life be supplied, the withholding of which would make it impossible that we could even attempt to play our part in the drama of life, viz., the fulfilling of God's purpose in creating us as free agents for the furtherance of His glory. If we bear in mind this preamble to the following petitions, it becomes a matter of supreme interest to ascertain what our Lord put first among the necessities of life. At first it seems as if His words refer simply to the preservation of our physical existence. But before we can say this, we have to determine as far as possible the meaning of a difficult word.

“OUR DAILY BREAD.”

The word translated “daily” is not found in any other Greek writing, and has given rise to the greatest variety of conjecture. One thing quite certain is that in the Lukian version of the prayer the adjective is tautological: “Give us day by day our daily bread” (R.V.), and this has led scholars to favour the two following interpretations among others: (a) “Give us to-day just so much as is needed for to-day to meet our physical requirements”; (b) “Give us to-day our bread for to-morrow.” In considering the bearing of these two meanings, and remembering how the petition marks a transition of thought in the prayer,

we are probably inclined to prefer (*a*) as more appropriate. Without discussing the technical reasons for the one as against the other, it will be useful to indicate clearly the difference between them, and their similarity.

(*b*) is the less simple, and appears at first sight to contradict the command contained in vi. 34, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof," and "Be not anxious for the morrow." How can that command be obeyed if in our model prayer we pray for the gift of to-morrow's necessities ? But as soon as the question is put, it is answered. So far from adding to our anxiety for the future, by offering the petition we dismiss it ; and we do so in the only way which is possible, by referring it trustfully to our Father in Heaven. Our Lord never ignores the simple fact that these earthly needs are realities, and however much it may be surmised by ardent minds that if it were not for human stupidity the pressure of bodily needs would cease, He recognises that practically this is not the case ; the majority of human lives always have been, and are, and will be liable to injury, curtailment, and distress, not from the fact of being largely absorbed in meeting bodily needs, but by harassing anxiety as to the future possibility of meeting them successfully. A considerable portion of the sixth chapter of the Great Sermon is given to the teaching on this subject, the main lesson being, that as we are God's children anxiety as to these matters is not to find place in our lives. The truth which is constantly reiterated, or clearly assumed where not expressed, is that there is no hope of overcoming this danger of anxiety except by trust in God, but that that is a perfectly sufficient safeguard. Now in offering up the petition (*b*) we put this principle into practice. The fulfilment of the petition, that on any one day we may have the assur-

ance as to the next day's supply of necessaries, obviously will result in the first of the two days being free of anxiety on this particular score. So far, then, from the prayer being in opposition to the command of ver. 34, it is in complete harmony with it, recognising the paramount necessity of our lives being spared the evil effects of haunting anxiety by casting the burden upon the Lord. The command can only be fulfilled by trust in God, and trust in God leads naturally to its expression in the form of prayer.

If, then, (*b*) is a prayer against anxiety about food, (*a*) is at first sight a prayer against excess: "Give us each day enough to live on and no more." But this form of words recognises the danger to our lives of two things, not only of excess but also of deficiency. "Enough to live on" implies "no more than enough," but also "no less." And we can clearly see in what sense such a petition would be used. Superabundance is, of course, a constant temptation to over-indulgence, while deficiency is a double evil—it threatens the continuance of the physical life, and it engenders anxiety, which is a grave peril to our spiritual life. Hence (*a*) in reality includes (*b*), unless we choose to conceive of the evils of deficiency solely as a menace to our physical life.

The objection to this interpretation is patent to any one who has caught the spirit of the Beatitudes, and, indeed, that of our Lord's teaching as a whole. One great characteristic of that teaching is, no doubt, the sane recognition of earthly needs (vi. 32), but on the subject of those needs men are warned and encouraged to view them according as they affect their spiritual relation to God, and we see in the Beatitudes how the spiritual issues dominate the physical. It could hardly be that Christ would begin the Sermon with "Blessed are the poor," and then go on to enjoin that the

very central petition in His model prayer should be *merely* against the most direct result of poverty, viz., insufficiency of food. Or, to put the matter in a slightly different light, granted that there is no objection whatever to our praying simply for an adequate supply of the necessities of life, it would be against the principles on which Christ's teaching proceeds if He merely reaffirmed the naturalness of such a prayer. That is to say, His rule evidently was to economise time by keeping silence in regard to such human aspirations as He saw to be right and legitimate, but to give all possible attention to the task of raising men's minds on some points to a new level, or of diverting them from error to truth. What He did not do was to reaffirm what everybody knew and practised, and if this petition in the Lord's Prayer is nothing but a request for physical necessities, it is a re-affirmation of the purely naturalistic instinct of self-preservation. But what would have been the use of this? Since the earliest days of mankind's existence, or, anyhow, since the beginning of the history of religion, man must have prayed for the supply of his bodily needs, and it is not likely that our Lord would have framed a petition for our use which was to be nothing more than the echo of the countless prayers which even savage man lifts to the Unknown God as soon as he can pray at all.

But if we refuse to conceive of want of food merely as a menace to our physical life; if, that is, we take it as imperilling our relation to God because it often engenders anxiety, then the purport of this particular clause is immensely enriched. And, further, (a) includes (b), that is to say, each of the two interpretations represent the petition as directed primarily against anxiety of mind in respect of the necessities of life. (a) says, "Save us from the dangers of a too abundant supply of food, and from those which belong to a

defective supply," *i.e.* luxury and anxiety. (*b*) says, "Save us from anxiety of mind by allowing us to feel each day that there is food for the morrow." The first seems the more comprehensive prayer, but it should be remarked that the second includes the idea of working for our daily bread with regularity. Christ could not have taught that we were to ask for provision for the morrow though we were to be idle to-day, since the most elementary knowledge of human nature convinces us that under these circumstances man certainly degenerates. And if this cannot be the meaning of the prayer, it must embrace the request for regularity of employment, in the sense that we require to feel at the close of each period that the work done has earned us immunity from starvation; in other words, that the conditions under which we live have allowed us to purchase tranquillity of mind by steady regular work. If this be part of the meaning of this weighty petition, how grievous is the sin of every society which forces whole swarms of its members to live and die idle though willing to work! We may well believe that our Lord was concerned about this deep and essential need of mankind—regularity of employment—chiefly as a safeguard against anxiety of mind.

Thus both (*a*) and (*b*) represent complex ideas, and it has been plausibly suggested that the very peculiar Greek word was coined as an approximate equivalent of an Aramaic expression which covered more ideas than one. At this point, however, we pass into the region of conjecture, and there is no likelihood of further research bringing us certainty as to the exact meaning of the original clause. But we may rest assured and thankful that the two interpretations of the Greek which have received the largest measure of support deal alike with a deep but not obvious neces-

sity of human nature, the need of a safeguard of our tranquillity of mind ; and further, that they equally suggest thoughts so rich and universal as to stir our gratitude afresh to Him who first framed the Christian's model prayer.

“ LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION.”

It is significantly remarked by Zahn that when we petition God not to lead us into temptation, we imply that without such a petition He may be expected to do this very thing. Further, that of two possible reasons for His so doing one is impossible. Temptation may be allowed, or even actually sent, for the purpose of strengthening a human being with a free will, or for the purpose of ruining him. The latter we conceive of as the diabolical motive of the spiritual enemy of mankind, and it must never be ascribed to God. But if temptation, then, is only permitted by God for our good, why do we pray against it ? Surely this is an extreme instance of the illogicality of prayer. Generally we pray for good things, which yet we may believe that a loving and Almighty Father would grant unasked, but here we actually deprecate a certain dealing with us on God's part which, *ex hypothesi*, must be for our good. And, moreover, all experience goes to show that it is really for our good. All strong men know perfectly well that in their lives the formative ingredient, the strengthening experience, has been the successful withstanding of temptation ; and in retrospect they can hardly conceive of the loss to themselves that it would have been if they had been without temptation ; if, that is, the daily-offered prayer had been literally granted and they had never been led into temptation. What, then, can be the reason of the insertion into the Lord's Prayer of this petition ?

Nothing is gained by denying the fact of this difficulty, or by insisting, as many writers have insisted, that we benefit ourselves morally by offering this petition ; in other words, that we guard ourselves against the spirit of vain self-confidence by owning to God our sense of weakness, and that deliberately to omit this request would be to court temptation in the very temper which makes it certain that we shall fall. This may be, and indeed is, perfectly true ; but we cannot conceive that Christ inserted the clause into His model prayer merely for our moral good and without reference to some deep underlying verity, since as soon as we begin, even faintly, to suspect this, the whole of the moral benefit disappears. We may continue to repeat the words, but unless we mean that we wish them to be granted and that our uttering them will really make a difference in God's dealings with us, there is nothing in the words any longer which can check our self-confidence or counteract our foolish pride. It would seem to be a sheer absurdity to fall on our knees and say, "We know that temptations are good for us if we are not too self-confident ; so merely as an antidote to self-confidence, we pray that they may not come at all."

The main consideration urged on p. 239 applies here also. We should fix our minds on the essential conditions of the wholesomest relationship between father and child that we know of, and we shall see that all that is most vital in that relationship transcends logic, but is thoroughly justified by our highest experience, and the most unanswerable logical objections to the relationship are found to be futile. For instance, the better a father is, the more he will know of his child's mind, of his deepest needs and best aspirations, and the more he will anticipate them and try to fulfil them ; in short, the less need there

is for the child to make him any request. But, in fact, the best fathers are those who are oftenest petitioned by their children, and the better a child is, the more honest and frank and guileless he is, the more he will utter his every want to his parents. There is no reason in all this, or rather the reason in it can only be seen when it has been transcended ; but if the whole matter had proceeded on reason alone, the life of the human relation would soon have withered away. Life after all is not the same as logic ; it constantly hastens on in advance and anticipates, careless whether logic will in time justify laboriously and patiently that which it has itself done with triumphant confidence and success, but which, if it had waited for logic, it would never have achieved at all.

In considering the exact bearing of the words, we can choose between two interpretations, the first being quite general and not a reasoned petition, but a cry, as it were, from the heart. The believer has just prayed for the needs of the present, then that his own past may not hang about him and separate him from God ; now he looks forward to the future, and his first thought is the danger that temptations may come too strong for him to resist. So he is told to pray that this may not be so, but that God would keep him away from sinning. This is, doubtless, the kind of sense that has been given to the words by unreflective petitioners at all times, and many a soul has felt that no more is required for the expressing of its deepest self-distrust and acknowledgment of God's power and love. But there must be more in the words than this. The striking phrase, "*bring us not into temptation*," the use of the singular noun when we should expect the plural, the double meaning, temptation and trial, the difficult transition

to the next clause with its ambiguous "but," the expression "deliver us from" (*i.e.* "away from," not "out of," as often elsewhere), and the question whether the second clause is a pendent to the first or a separate request—all these points are put on one side as unimportant by those who are contented with the above. So scholars have gone further into the elucidation of the terms and into the theological problems raised by the petition being taught us at all. And when this course—the second of the two above alluded to—is adopted, a crop of formidable difficulties springs up. They probably cannot be adequately answered; but it seems safe to go so far as to say that the idea of God bringing us into temptation belongs to the experience of sharp trials of our faith and moral principle, which we feel should have been spared if we had always relied on God; the allusion being to extra and avoidable trials into which God leads or brings us, to rouse us from the torpor of false security, because there is no better way of waking men from the sleep of death. If this is so, the prayer is in reality that we may be saved from heedless security, and we are reminded of the parable of the ten virgins and of many grave and emphatic sayings of Christ (*e.g.* Mark ii. 16), otherwise we should be praying against the one effectual medicine of our own disease. A rough paraphrase would therefore be, "May it not become necessary that we be roused from spiritual sloth by being brought into special temptation and so falling into sin, but rather so guide our lives that we be kept from evil." The prayer thus touches the great mystery of evil being evil and yet capable of being made the beginning of good, and, as far as we can see, its essential condition; and it reminds us that our deepest instincts prompt us to pray against being

exposed to evil, while yet we can hardly imagine ourselves making progress without it, and nowhere is the paradox more distinctly stated. We end the prayer which breathes the very spirit of sonship and trust, by recognising God's supreme power over the kingdom of evil as far as it concerns human life. He can so dispose it as to spare us its contact or to bring it about; and even while professing our trust in Him we are instructed by the Saviour to deprecate a certain use, so to speak, which He might make of evil, viz. the employment of it as a means of averting the destruction of the soul. It is most important, therefore, to see that so far from failing to recognise the mystery of human life, Jesus Christ has here set it before us in its plainest outlines and sharpest contradictions so boldly and thoroughly as to suggest that, while withholding from us the explanation, He kept it before His own mind.

If this interpretation of the clause be on the right lines, we distinguish the stagnation of our spiritual being from actual falling into sin. The first is only to be cured by our being exposed to the second; but the mere possibility of the lapse is so terrible that, in spite of the curative effect ascribed to it, we pray against its being employed. We can hardly help inferring from this that Christ took very decidedly a view of sin which often meets with much disapproval at the present day. His teaching is that nothing is so terrible as the falling into sin, unless it be the spiritual stagnation which originally made the liability to collapse a necessity. By spiritual stagnation is meant the sort of hard-heartedness and self-satisfaction for which a sudden collapse is a possible cure. But whether we fix our attention on the awfulness of the original disease, or of the cure, it seems clear that our Lord utterly discountenances the idea that we

can afford to be optimistic about the evil of sin, or that we can regard it as a merely negative thing, or as merely a stage in upward growth. We have heard a preacher quoted as saying that he owed his progress in spiritual growth to nothing so much as to his sins. This is one attitude. But a member of his audience came away saying, "He makes me so contented with myself, and strips away the need for self-abasement, in short, for penitence, so skilfully that I feel sure he is wrong." This is another frame of mind in respect of sin, and nothing is gained by confusing the two. Apart from other indications given throughout His ministry, we may infer from this passage that of the two views our Lord gives prominence to the more severe, from which we of this present age are inclined to shrink.

XIX

FASTING

vi. 16-18

AN interesting question to a modern reader of the Sermon on the Mount is whether in these verses Christ enjoins fasting as a duty. It is not uncommon to find in commentaries, especially in those written by German Protestants, statements to the effect that He discountenanced fasting in His own circle of followers, and abstained from the practice Himself ; and His whole attitude towards externalism is pointed to as affording strong evidence in favour of these statements. This is not the place for an exhaustive discussion of Christ's teaching on fasting, but we have to determine, if possible, the precise bearing of this particular passage on the matter, and it may at once be said that the answer is not so simple as might be supposed. It may be urged on one side that our Lord is engaged simply in taking instances from Jewish life of virtuous practices and warning His followers against the hypocritical fashion of display ; and that the question as to these practices being indispensable to the religious life was not in His mind. There is a wrong way of performing the common duties of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting against which they had to be emphatically warned, and the whole stress of the passage is on this subject of the fatal disease of ostentation, just as it was in the

matter of almsgiving and prayer. Again, that there was at that time a party of strict religionists who added enormously to the Mosaic requirements of fasting, and it is a proof that Christ was not concerned here with the nature of the obligation but merely with the manner of its performance, that He utters no word of disapproval against an ordinance which He allowed His disciples to violate in practice (Mark ii. 18 f.). It is probable that in His own Person He carried out the Mosaic law, but hardly conceivable that He fasted twice in the week. If therefore we had here a record of His teaching on the extent to which fasting is a duty binding on the members of God's Kingdom, we should find that our Lord, by precept as well as example, loosed the burden from the necks of His disciples, as He must have done at other times in private. If, then, we are to take these verses as dealing with another aspect of the subject altogether, why not dismiss from our minds all reference to the duty of fasting, and consider only the dangers of hypocrisy ?

Now we may grant that the duty of observing the ordinance is not the primary subject of these verses. Undoubtedly our Lord chooses this religious ordinance merely as one out of three, the binding character of which no one of His contemporaries would have questioned, and which were universally recognised. But as soon as we admit the fact, we have to consider if it does not suggest an inference. To point His moral Christ chooses three practices, two of which no one denies to be quite indispensable to the religious life. If, then, the third is, so to speak, unconsciously added while the Speaker's mind was occupied with another matter, is it not a proof that He rated it as no less obligatory ? His view of the duty is better indicated in this way than if He had

formally undertaken its defence. It is as if He had said, "I want to warn you against ostentation, and I will therefore take three duties which you cannot help performing, and show you how easy it is to perform them in an ostentatious way." Is it to be supposed that if Christ had disapproved or thought little of the practice, He would simply have mentioned it in this way as one of a very peculiarly important series, implying that its claims were as incontestable as those of prayer and the giving of alms ?

To this it may be replied that His estimate of the comparative importance of the three duties must be indicated by the fact of His having elsewhere enjoined, though indirectly, the performance of the first two, while He says nothing and apparently does nothing to commend the third to men's notice, but rather the contrary. And just as it was His practice to leave institutions and social customs which were against the spirit of His Kingdom to the dissolving influence of time and the training of the Holy Spirit, so He left this practice to be dealt with in the same way, merely showing on another occasion how it was naturally connected with a time of sorrow, and therefore to be safely ignored in a time of rejoicing. In short, His handling of the theme here is so light that it allows us to infer His intention of leaving the question of the binding nature of the duty to the Church when it was founded ; perhaps gently loosening its bonds by silence and laxity in His own practice.

This view implies that though fasting is here ranged along with the other two primary religious duties, Christ in so doing was only accommodating Himself to the practices of the time ; and that though they may have been transitory, they served perfectly to illustrate the point He was then making against hypocrisy ; and the illustration remains valid for us, though the

particular fashion of exhibiting sorrow for sin and bereavement by fasting is no more observed. And it does not seem possible to disprove this contention, though there will always be many minds to which the connexion with prayer and almsgiving will seem to outweigh all considerations tending to minimise the importance of fasting. Others would say that if this passage stood alone it would not be certain what Christ meant to enjoin as to this duty. The force of the contention as to the juxtaposition is balanced by the fact that whereas our Lord enforced the other two duties by precept and example, He was certainly lenient in respect of the third.

Again, some would urge that the words "and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall recompense thee," necessarily imply that Christ enjoined upon His followers this duty, and to it attaches a promise. There is force in this, no doubt, but less than if the passage were single. Its place in a series makes it possible to take the words as a kind of refrain, emphasising not the fact that this is a practice certain to bring a reward with it, but that, as in the other two cases, there need be no fear of God overlooking this or any act of service merely because men do not take notice of it. It is conceivable that our Lord may have had in His mind the transitory character of the practice even while commanding it to this extent; but no cautious student of His teaching would assert this positively.

But, as already said, any discussion of the general subject of fasting which concerned this passage alone would ignore the very important passage in Mark ii. The divergence of view which exists among English churchmen depends on different conceptions as to Church authority, which again rest on the general view entertained of the work of the Holy Spirit and

the development of the primary doctrines of Revelation. It should be remarked, moreover, that the reason for fasting which nowadays plays an important part, viz., the curbing of the appetites, was before the time of Christ either absent or quite secondary to the idea of conjoining fasting with sorrow for sin. These and various other considerations would have to be taken into account in any adequate treatment of the general subject.

We pass on now to the question of publicity in such a matter as fasting. How is it that not only is the picture drawn of the hypocrites most repulsive, but the idea of forcing such a practice on the attention of our neighbours is perhaps more odious than publicity in prayer and almsgiving? Some light on the meaning of fasting will be gained if this question can be fairly answered. Supposing, for instance, that the modern conception is allowed to prevail, as it certainly does in many quarters, viz., that for our general welfare we require to take special precautions against the power of bodily appetites, to fight against the "wildness of the flesh," as Hooker calls it, otherwise the equilibrium of our complex being is upset, then it is not easy to say why we instinctively dislike publicity. If it is simply a question of our own moral and spiritual welfare, there is no reason why we should shrink from observation in the performance of this duty any more than when we take a walk for the sake of our bodily health, or engage in some professional work simply because it is good for us. Nor, again, is the question easy to answer if we remain contented with another popular explanation of the duty, viz., that we fast simply in obedience to the Church's rule. The same might be said of going to church or keeping Sunday free of secular employments—those who observe these duties have no sort

of objection to being seen in carrying them out. But with regard to the three duties mentioned in chap. vi., we find a general disposition to shrink from the gaze of men in the performance of them—a disposition too instinctive to be explained by simple unreasoning obedience to Christ's command—and even if this were otherwise, it would be well for us to inquire on what principle that command rests. We observe, meantime, that it is very strongly worded: "But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thy head and wash thy face, that thou be not seen of men to fast;" that is to say, our Lord orders not simple privacy, as in verse 6, or unconscious spontaneity, as in verse 3, but something apparently verging on deception of others or dissimulation. The question therefore arises: What is there peculiar about the duty of fasting, as compared with almsgiving and prayer, which makes it incumbent upon us to take quite special precautions that it should not be made an occasion for display? For in accordance with a principle of interpretation generally recognised as valid (see on vii. 4) we take the vivid pictorial expressions not literally, but as indicating that the claims of this particular injunction are specially urgent.

The answer seems to be that while prayer and almsgiving are in reality acts of service to God, and there is an instinct within us which forbids us from exposing our relation to God more than is necessary to the gaze of our fellow-men, there is this peculiarity about fasting, that it is in its fundamental meaning a natural expression of sorrow for sin. Such at least was the Scriptural view of it.¹ When it is coupled with prayer it is that outward expression of our spiritual communion with God which sorrow for sin

¹ Zahn collects the following passages: Matt. ix. 14 f.; Mark ii. 18-20; Joel ii. 12; Zach. vii. 5; 1 Sam. ii. 5, xx. 34; 2 Sam. i. 12; Dan. x. 2 f.

naturally demands. If our lives were conducted according to the spirit of the Biblical writers, it would be just as easy for us to fast at times set apart by the Church for penitence as it would be to abstain from conviviality and merry-making in times of bereavement. And if this statement is for some readers unpalatably strong, let it suffice that this idea of fasting was undoubtedly assumed by our Lord, and that in treating the subject He leaves it uncorrected. Under this aspect, then, it is not difficult to see why publicity in the performance of this particular duty is specially odious. It is bad enough if according to the behaviour condemned in v. 5 we come before our fellow-men and say, "See how careful I am about my spiritual intercourse with our Heavenly Father," or, as in v. 2, "Take notice of my kindly actions towards the poor." But the contradiction between what we do and what we pretend to be doing becomes more glaring, more contemptibly selfish and stupid when we virtually say, "Come and notice how deep and genuine is my sorrow for my own sin and for the sins of others," with the intention of securing credit for ourselves. To try to make capital out of our offences against our God is the very climax of religious madness. It is the employment of our relation to the Most High for the miserably delusive end of gaining some senseless applause from others, and turning what is *ex hypothesi* self-abasement into a means of self-exaltation. The wickedness of such behaviour, quite immeasurable though it be, is almost concealed by its stupidity; and certainly one of the most humiliating facts about mankind is that it does not fail of securing its reward. This is partly explained by the complexity of the motives which induce people to be ascetic, and the difficulty of distinguishing between them; and by the simple fact that whatever be

the motive, asceticism does indicate a certain mastery of mind over appetite which it is beyond the power of ordinary men to acquire.

We may now sum up some observations suggested by a study of the three illustrations of hypocrisy. They are given by our Lord without any invective or waste of emphasis, but the description is all the more scathing owing to the moderation with which it is drawn, and its repulsiveness is perhaps greatest in the last of the three pictures, that of the man who makes a show of his sorrow for sin, that he may win for himself applause from the most foolish of his contemporaries. A melancholy spectacle, indeed! But while it is true that this terrible exposure has made it practically impossible that men should ever again degrade themselves in *exactly* this fashion, it is well to reflect how deep-seated must be the desire for applause which has been strong enough in the past to induce man to debase himself, most miserably, even in the very act of self-exaltation, and under different but not dissimilar forms shows itself in no less grotesque follies to-day. And, because it is deep-seated, Christ dealt with it in a spirit of the utmost severity; the severity which is born of a "vast pity" and a love far too great to allow Him to pass by this secret source of human failure. It is a disease, not of open defiance of God, or of yielding to the infirmities of bodily appetite, but of corrupt allegiance; and the plain inference is that far worse than indifference, or sloth, or lust, there is this startling tendency in men and women, reckoned as zealous servants of the Most High, to poison their highest instincts with selfishness, and to deprave their best activities with the cravings of pride. Worse than self-indulgence, worse even than cold-heartedness and cruelty, is the wrong sort of religious or philanthropic zeal.

It is certain that mankind have not yet learned this lesson ; that is to say, in our ordinary estimate of virtuous conduct we unquestioningly rate philanthropic activity very high. It is all that we usually demand of each other ; or, again, in education, not only is little or nothing said about the paramount necessity of a pure motive, but if a boy or girl shows industry and a willingness to take trouble about worthy objects, we seem to assume that the problem of character-training is solved. And yet it is just in this sort of conduct that the hypocritical spirit would exert itself if it be there. True though it be that we have no right to judge inner motives, and still less to speak of them, there should at least be something of reserve and caution in our panegyrics of fashionable virtues. The more fashionable they are the more the modern Pharisee is led to practise them, even at the cost of much trouble and self-denial, and the knowledge that the fairest show of them *may* be nothing more than the outward exhibition of the actor's instinct for applause should temper our praise of each other, our verdicts given in public, our obituary encomiums, with something of the caution born of a godly fear. Rash and superficial judgments, marked by the leniency which modern opinion demands, act as a stimulus to the characters that crave applause, and all the time there is being enacted the mighty drama of countless human souls. And, again, in our ordinary estimate of sin how astonishingly superficial and un-Christlike is the tone ! In some circles of society the only deadly offence a man can commit is one which concerns his neighbour's pocket, namely, cheating at cards. But among people of a very different stamp it is strange to find that moral zeal means little more than a vigorous insistence on the horrible wrongfulness and deadly danger of certain definite vices,

such as impurity or untruthfulness, as if mankind with their complex infirmities and strange power of caricaturing goodness had nothing else to fear. If our crude and thoughtless condemnation of such things were habitually tempered with knowledge of Christ's view of sinners the world would be a very different place. We ought not to be content to forget that, according to His teaching, the one deadly sin is that from which the criminal and the vicious are generally free, the being good for the sake of men's approval.

But this very expression, "men's approval," suggests that we ought to paraphrase the precept still further. "Men's approval," as here alluded to, means exactly that favourable shallow commendation which a society gives to its members merely because they follow its fashion; and to live by fashion is the one course open to the man who refuses to follow principle; and of the two courses the former makes much less demand than the latter upon the mind and thought. Therefore we cannot be wrong in paraphrasing the precept: "When ye fast do not fast as those who do it heedlessly, stupidly." By "heedlessly" is meant following the opinion of the majority, without giving heed to the principles of conduct which are deeply rooted and can stand investigation. When this is the case a man either drifts along without a motive at all, with no object in view—which must be very rare—or he seeks the commendation of the majority. In either case he is acting blindly, stupidly. Hence it is to be inferred, as in the other two instances in this chapter, that the precept is not a precept which enjoins fasting, but one which warns us against acting in an important and typical question of conduct without knowing what we are doing. It follows that we can disobey the precept by heedlessly

refusing to fast just as well as by heedlessly fasting ; indeed, such disobedience as that must be easier than the other, as it means, *ex hypothesi*, acting according to inclination and appetite, and it is easier to curry favour with public opinion by indulgence than by asceticism ; and there is nothing to show that the former involves any more thought than the latter.

Our Lord has now shown that the practice of certain public recognised virtues may be the symptom of a character rotten to the core. It may be ostensibly the outcome of piety, but in reality the expression of selfishness. Down at the root of the mischief there is the simple fact that men forget the existence of their Heavenly Father. This forgetfulness manifests itself in another way against which Christ proceeds to warn us.

XX

“ LAY NOT UP FOR YOURSELVES ”

vi. 19

BEFORE investigating the teaching contained in the remainder of this chapter the reader would do well to remind himself how easy it is for people who profess a special reverence for the Sermon on the Mount to overlook certain wrong tempers and practices which are there denounced ; and, again, certain virtuous dispositions, which are enjoined upon us as being all-important for membership in the kingdom. In the previous case, the deadly sin was found to be a distortion of motive which utterly ruins service to God and man. And meantime we see that the public opinion of earnest and religious people is exercised about various breaches of the moral law, against which Christ says little or nothing. So here we shall probably find that the warnings are directed against a tone of mind which is frequently thought to be not only innocent, but the indication of seriousness of purpose, and, indeed, almost essential to a good life, viz., anxiety about the future. The Speaker, in short, is dealing with the idea of life and duty formed and passed on to others by *good* people ; not by the triflers, or the godless, or the rebellious of the world, but by sober, earnest-minded, patriotic folk ; and herein we remember that our Lord gave enormously more attention to the opinions and feelings of such people

than to those of the heedless and openly self-indulgent, of whom, indeed, He took comparatively little notice.

We observe, then, that at first sight this well-known paragraph—perhaps the best known of any—appears to inculcate something like carelessness in practical business matters; and especially is this impression conveyed by the Authorised Version; and then we remember that at the present day a large number of earnest-minded, patriotic persons look upon carelessness of this sort as a besetting infirmity of the English character, which mars our efficiency in commercial competition. Our ears are dinned with exhortations to look ahead and make provision for future dangers which menace our earthly prosperity. This striking feature of modern life is sufficient to give a special interest to the consideration of the following paragraph.

The problem before us is first to make clear wherein lies the mischief of laying up treasure on earth; then, the meaning of the opposite, “laying up treasure in heaven”; lastly, to note the connexion of the paragraph with the context.

It seems that two reasons for the prohibition are given: (1) It is of no use storing up treasure, because the forces of dissolution and waste are too strong for us. This is obviously a maxim of worldly prudence, and, as such, profoundly unsatisfactory. To begin with, it would mean that Christ here abandoned the principle which He elsewhere carefully observes in His teaching—the principle of revealing to man the comparative importance of efforts with a spiritual, and those with a temporal aim, not on the assumption that the latter fail of their object, but that they succeed. This is the point, for instance, in the parable of the Rich Fool. But on how much lower a tone would

this teaching here be pitched if its meaning were "Do not store up treasure on earth, because you will find that your storing fails of its object; what you garner, time will scatter, and I recommend some expenditure of effort in a region where there is no such dissolution and loss." This would be an appeal to the business instincts of men on a business matter somewhat in the tone of the pagan poets, Horace and Juvenal. But it is not for maxims of this sort that we turn to the great Sermon. Moreover, the assertion would be traversed by business men and prudent worldlings of all sorts, and it is nowhere hinted in the New Testament that business men are bad judges of business. They would say with perfect truth that "laying up in store," if the expression be modernised so as to include all kinds of prudence in money matters—investments, insurance, and so forth—succeeds in its object very well. Occasionally, no doubt, forethought is deceived, but not often. And it is to be deplored that many careless readers of these words suppose that they do really enjoin thriftlessness and imprudence in matters of property, though it is found that such qualities produce a great deal of unhappiness.

The expression, "for yourselves," guides us to the right interpretation.¹ A correct paraphrase would be, "Strive not to become owners of property." And then our Lord goes on to say, not simply that property is perishable, but that, though perishable, it is found to absorb the affections. In short, it is a question not at all of the success or failure of the efforts, but of their effect on character; and when we recognise this we feel ourselves once more in the native atmosphere, so to speak, of Christ's teaching. We are forbidden to give time and trouble to the acquisition of property for its own sake, that is, merely

¹ Zahn, *in loc.*

because ownership is pleasant ; and the reason given is that there is a deceptiveness about ownership to which men are constantly falling victims, viz., that it seems to promise permanence and stability, whereas it is the very type of the fleeting and the perishable ; and this quality must be taken into account when we consider the serious fact that our affections follow our efforts. Our hearts become absorbed in what we are doing. In other words, we grow to love that which we fancy to be stable, but which in reality speaks most eloquently of change and decay.

At this point, however, the worldling interposes, "Why should I not give my mind to that which is perishable perhaps in one aspect, but in reality permanent enough for all practical purposes ? What injury to character is involved here ? Some grand characters have been manifested in the management of property, and we feel that there is something unreal about the precept as thus explained."

It may be remarked that among all Christ's sayings this is the most Platonic. The great Greek teacher insisted again and again on the absolute necessity for a soul that was to be really healthy of contemplating things permanent and truly existing, not the changeable and fleeting. And though it is not easy to formulate the reasons for this idea, we do generally recognise its truth, however much our practice contradicts it. The feeling against the growth of luxury is partly due to the fact that more and more labour tends to be absorbed in the making of perishable articles : and we should be uneasy about a near relation of our own becoming engrossed in an undertaking for the production of such articles. In other words, we have a dim idea that at best the contemplation of the transient does no good ; that it probably gives something of a shallow character to the man, a slightness,

a conventionality, and a disposition to the kind of versatility which accomplishes nothing of permanent value for mankind. At any rate, it is well to note that if the Sermon on the Mount is to be charged with unreality, in different words similar indictments have been preferred against the greatest teachers of the human race from Socrates onwards, and yet the best opinion has recognised the greatness of these men.

It is clear anyhow that stress must be laid on the words "for yourselves"; that is to say, the prohibition is against ownership divorced from any idea of stewardship. To lay up in store for ourselves is to accumulate possessions with no object in view but our personal enjoyment: if successfully done this absorbs time and energy, and finally affection: first, man's strength is given to the quest, then his heart, and throughout he has not set before himself any aim of service whatever. Thus the prohibition does not touch the making provision for children, though it would forbid the straining after leaving them enough to make them rich, unless there is some spiritual or social object in so doing. Otherwise the motive can only be self-gratification in a kind of deferred ownership. It may be that underlying the pagan dissatisfaction at the hollowness of the pleasures of wealth were some of these facts as to the effect on character, but it is interesting to observe that there was so little conception of social service among the Greek and Roman writers of classical times that they were unable to trace their dissatisfaction to its source; but Christian moralists know quite well that the only way of avoiding the curse of riches is to use them as stewards, *i.e.* for distribution.

But we must now consider the alternative, the laying up in heaven. First it is to be noticed that the

words "for yourselves" occur again, and apparently present this difficulty, that if the banefulness of earthly ownership lies in its selfishness, it is possible so to enjoin the duty of storing in heaven as to appeal to a motive quite as evil because purely selfish. The answer, however, is plain. The storing up on earth is (*ex hypothesi*) selfish in its aim, and ends in nakedness and self-spoliation ; the storing up in heaven is unselfish and Godward, and ends in self-enrichment, because it has at no time aimed at enjoyment. Thus, as always, the true development of self is in being unselfish, and there is no antithesis between aiming at the betterment of the individual who gives and of the society which receives. The expression "treasure in heaven" is easier to understand than to formulate. It is well illustrated by the solemn but gracious words spoken by our Lord after the parable of the Unjust Steward (Luke xvi. 9). "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when it shall fail they may receive you into the eternal tabernacles." The use of wealth, in other words, should have an eternal aim ; there should ever be in it something that cannot be estimated or even discerned so long as this life in time shall last. And the principle holds good of all talents. There is a curse attached to the selfish use of them which sooner or later makes itself felt, and of none is this more true than of bodily health. "The healthy know not of their health, but only the sick." The setting of our affections on this possession gradually deprives us of it. The same is true of fame and a good reputation.

The complete unworldliness of Christ's appeal may be tested by comparison with our ordinary injunctions to each other on the subject of storing up. To any young man going into commercial life the ordinary exhortation runs as follows : "Be interested in your

work and you will get on ; " in other words, " Let your affections become absorbed in what you are doing and you will not fail to become rich." Our Lord says, " If you strive to become rich, your affections will be absorbed, which is fatal." There is, however, a way of dealing with possessions which, even if they increase, will avoid the peril ; it is, broadly speaking, to treat them as opportunities of service to God through distribution on earth ; and the wonder will be the self-enrichment which some day will be found to have resulted.

XXI

THE LAMP OF THE BODY IS THE EYE

vi. 22-24

THE connexion clearly is that the effect on character which we found resulted from the wrong treatment of ownership is compared to the mischief resulting to the physical being from the darkening of the organ of light, the eye.¹ To what the figure points is clear from the peculiar phraseology, "Thy whole body shall be full of light," this being one of those passages where the unnaturalness of the figurative language is due to the vividness with which the underlying truth is brought out. Another strange expression as applied to the bodily eye is "single,"

¹ The parallel passage in St. Luke xi. 34 gives a totally different connexion, and offers a tempting opportunity for theorising on the Synoptic problem. Certainly the Mount passage is the more coherent; but there are no data for determining the question whether our Lord introduced the image into His teaching more than once. Critics often assume that this could not have been done, but without evidence. They are then forced to account for the Lukan passage in one way or another. Those however who wish to learn the most they can from the teaching of Christ are under no necessity of waiting an indefinite time till this question of priority is settled. The more sensible plan is to try to understand the context of both passages as they stand, pending further investigation; for even if we are in doubt as to the precise connexion in which our Lord used the image, it is clear that the compilers of the Gospels saw a connexion in each case with the context now before us. And till we know far more than we yet know as to these parallel passages, why not discern as clearly as we can the compiler's idea of the relation of the different thoughts?

where we should expect some word like "healthy," the opposite of *πονηρός*, translated evil, but meaning rather in its concrete sense "corrupt." Another question that presents itself arises out of the end of v. 23. "If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is the darkness!" What is "the light that is in thee"? for the image of the bodily eye gives very little help here; and "how great is the darkness!" seems to point to a condition of spiritual darkness worse than some other. Than what? And finally, is there a natural connexion with the next passage, "No man can serve two masters?"

The answers to these questions may be given briefly. Christ is depicting the result of the darkening of something within us which in the spiritual or moral world answers to the eye in the physical. This must be the organ with which we apprehend God, or perhaps the faculty whereby we determine moral claims and distinguish duty from inclination: this is called conscience. Now if these supreme faculties in man get to be vitiated, or somehow turned from their proper use, there results a darkening of man's spiritual being analogous to physical blindness, but far more grievous and complete. It is represented by the straining of the figure as the spoiling of an organ which not only receives light as the eye does from the sun, but which gives light, illuminating as from a centre the highest portion of man's being. And if we ask how is this part of us vitiated, the answer is indicated by the word "single." Evidently this spiritual faculty within us is spoilt by losing its singleness, and the result then is that the whole inner life of the man is sunk in spiritual darkness. He no longer has a principle to guide him. And by losing its singleness we mean that the faculty is no longer exercised in apprehend-

ing God, but in a degree varying in individual cases, is absorbed in the contemplation of things mundane. This must be the connexion of these sentences with the warning against laying up treasure on earth. The darkness supervening in man's spiritual life is the result of the "heart" or affections being given to things of no permanent worth in themselves. But, further, this spiritual darkness is so complete that it allows a man to attempt the impossible, viz., to serve two masters, in other words, to live according to two different ideals. This is the connexion with the famous warning which follows.

It is fairly obvious that the picture drawn is meant as a warning of what may easily happen to those who are trying to regulate their lives according to some leading principle. For those who simply drift, the wholly *insouciant*, Christ utters no message. This most impressive passage, therefore, must be added to the long list of those which deal with the perversions of good people, ordinarily so called. Not aimlessness but wrongheadedness is the object of the most powerful denunciations in the Gospel. And, further, the warning may be regarded in two different lights, according as it is, or is not, supplemented by the idea of divine help or illumination being promised to man's struggling efforts. Supposing we think of the words, as most modern hearers undoubtedly do, in isolation from any special promise of spiritual grace, then, can anything more discouraging be imagined? The words imply that it is easy for men to be totally in error as to the main principle on which their lives are being ordered, and to mistake something evil or valueless for the *summum bonum* itself. But could anything be more useless than to tell a blind man that he is blind, if that is all there is to be said? The emphasis on the totality of the dark-

ness makes the utterance perfectly hopeless as regards renovation of the organ of sight, unless the hearer has some notion of a promised illumination which he himself is of course quite unable to furnish. That is to say, we are once more reminded that Christ's teaching is conditioned by the day of Pentecost looming brightly before the Apostles. If man is assured that he has spiritual illumination to which he can turn, then it may be profitable for him to be told that as things are he may very likely be following a Will o' the Wisp, and that according as he succeeds in what he thinks to be his best endeavours, he is plunging more and more deeply into an abysmal quagmire. Otherwise, the words are merely a picture of irremediable error, or misdirected zeal, and inevitable ruin. If any such meaning as this is to be found in the Sermon on the Mount, we have to explain in what sense we conceive of it as part of the Gospel or news of salvation to mankind.

The Greek words are chosen with great skill, if, as we believe, they are a translation of Aramaic. The "single eye" means the spiritual organ turned towards God so steadily that it receives light from Him, but also diffuses it so that the human being not only knows whither he is walking and how to walk in his earthly pilgrimage, but becomes full of light: an expression describing what the more favoured of God's children have seen in some few of the men they have known. The "evil eye" is, again, a phrase covering much ground; we might expect that the opposite to the eye which is healthy would be simply one which could not see; but the adjective, while applicable to a diseased condition of the organ, also hints at its wrong use; the faculty may be in full vigour, but what if it be employed on the wrong things?

It is to be observed that our Lord does not explain

which is cause and which is effect in this terrible picture of a spiritually endowed being. Does the bondage to perishable things produce the blindness, or the blindness cause the bondage? Scientifically we feel a great curiosity to know; but the teaching by which we are to be guided is not directed towards increasing our knowledge of causes, but towards enlightening us as to the motives and tendencies of ordinary conduct.¹ It is here that the divergence between the scientific and the Christian spirit ordinarily lies. An absurd idea has been that science is hostile to religion because of the truths which it reveals. Possibly we have outgrown this notion, but it remains true that scientific people and (say) clergymen have great difficulty in understanding each other, and the reason is that there is an apparent incompatibility between two views of life, the one which rates an increase in knowledge as a worthy object of effort to be singly pursued; the other which estimates this as little compared with the establishment of a right relation to God in moral and spiritual matters, the intellectual development being held to be subsidiary. It is probable that in time this antagonism of view will be found to be quite as illusory as the other. There is no doubt as to the paramount importance in Christian teaching of a right relation to God, as tested by motives of conduct and by the doing of duty to others. But it may well be that the advancing of knowledge is a part of the duty confided to man, sacred and infinitely important because it affects our relation to God, and is therefore not to be decried by Christians. Nor, on the other hand, is it at all necessary that those who give their lives to the advancement of knowledge should blind themselves to the fact that they are engaged in a work of service to

¹ Except perhaps the Johannine reports.

God as well as to their fellow-men. There are enough instances on record to prove that this kind of hallowing of service does not diminish in any way its potency for good.

When our Lord says that we cannot serve two masters, we are to infer that the attempt to do so is in reality a slavery to the wrong one, fatally dangerous because it is mixed with pretence.

Quite briefly the connexion of the warnings from the beginning of the chapter to this point may be thus summarised. The laying up of treasure in store is forbidden, because it leads to a loving of what is perishable ; that in its turn to a darkening of the inner eye of man's highest faculty ; and this, again, induces blindness in regard to the vital question of divided service (John v. 44).

XXII

“BE NOT ANXIOUS”

vi. 25-34

IN ver. 25 the expression “on this account,” or as in R.V. “therefore,” points to a connexion between anxiety, which is going to be dealt with, and the storing up of treasure, which has just been forbidden. In other words, the double-mindedness exhibited by accumulation of riches is betrayed no less certainly by a haunting anxiety as to the bare necessities of life. But most people would judge the latter to be more excusable, in that it may easily be more unselfish: it may be caused principally by concern for those who are dependent on us. None the less it has its roots in the same fundamental defect, viz. want of trust in God.

Extreme familiarity with these words must not blind us to their surpassing importance. We have to consider our Lord’s attitude towards the claims of prudence in worldly matters. Is it forbidden? In other words, if there be no anxiety whatever about the morrow and about life’s necessities, will there be any forethought? Another important question is the connexion of the argument, “Is not the life more than the food?” with the prohibition. And if anxiety on these subjects is forbidden, what about anxiety in spiritual matters, for instance, as to our qualifications for “the kingdom”? These and other points will be

best dealt with in some remarks on the general teaching of the paragraph.

In regard to the necessities of life man is exposed to a twofold danger. If he is amply supplied with them, and has the means of procuring for himself a superfluity, then he is tempted to self-indulgence ; life for him brings no idea of a burden to be borne, and it is difficult for him to enter into the spirit of Christianity of which suffering and self-sacrifice seem to be essential conditions. If, on the other hand, he is insufficiently equipped with these necessities he is tempted to harbour a gnawing anxiety as to means of livelihood, and the problem of to-morrow weighs down the spirit. These facts have made many moralists aspire to a golden mean, and the praises of it are constantly repeated by poets of all ages. Now of these two dangers it is a striking fact that the former assumes a far greater prominence in human writings than the latter. But in Christ's teaching the reverse holds good. Whereas moralists, preachers, and poets inveigh at large on the sinfulness of luxury and its evil effects—giving mostly the best of their energies to verbal denunciation rather than to an example of simple living—our Lord dismisses the subject in a few pithy sentences, which leave it doubtful wherein the exact danger of wealth lies ; and then devotes the grandest powers of His eloquence, the most searching of His aphorisms, and the most attractive of His illustrations to cautioning us against the opposite temper of mind ; not against careless self-indulgence, but rather against the carking care which is due to an apparently imminent failure of supply. And we have to determine, if we can, why there is the paradoxical preference ; why the danger which seems to us the less serious is depicted by Christ with far more insistence and urgency than the contrary.

Among other puzzling facts about the subject is this, that not only do riches constitute a great danger to the possessor, but a heedless open-handedness, a liberality in giving without careful and scrupulous consideration, results in a vast spread of unhappiness such as it is quite out of the power of the poor man to cause. The latter may be as narrow-minded, as querulous, as depressed and worried as possible, but can the mischief he causes be compared for a moment with that of foolish and indiscriminate charity, or with the deep and far-reaching mischief caused by the spending of thousands of pounds on vanities and luxury, so that the lives of multitudes are devoted to the production of tinsel and ephemeral toys, and instruments of worthless pleasures? Obviously if our Lord chooses the dangers of poverty as more serious than those of riches, it must be for some grave reason, the discernment of which is important for us in proportion to its difficulty. Of course, man's conduct frequently contradicts his principles in regard to riches; but the serious truth is that it is in our times of reflection and self-control that we form convictions concerning the deadly dangers of riches, and almost crave after poverty as a condition of the higher life. Yet it is from anxiety which Christ evidently desires to deliver us more than from self-indulgence, and anxiety grows in the surroundings of impecuniosity, not of affluence. So that we need to review in the light of Christ's teaching not our careless and most superficial opinions, but our solid and serious convictions, the staple food of the preachers and moralists of all ages.

The first hint as to Christ's point of view is given by the word "therefore" in ver. 25. As already explained, the retrospective and prospective force of this word points to a connexion between vers. 19

and 25. In other words, the evils resulting from storing up treasure tells on the character in a peculiar way ; and something similar must be the effect on the character of anxiety as to the future in the matter of life's necessaries. There can be little doubt that the fundamental connexion lies in the tendency of each to encourage mistrust of God, or quite as probably in the outcome of that mistrust. It would be a gross misinterpretation of the passage to infer that there is any discouragement of ordinary prudence in money matters. Forethought is not the cause or the result, but is a preventive of anxiety. For instance, insurance, which is sometimes represented as a form of gambling, is in reality designed to allay that very excitement which the gambler seeks ; and the confusion arises from our not perceiving that what Christ is warning us against is not a sort of conduct but a temper of mind, and the form in which the warning is often cast, as if a certain outward action were being forbidden, is due to the necessity of vivid popular speech. Neither prudence nor imprudence in the management of earthly goods is in question. To urge the one and discourage the other would be to lower the Discourse to the level of man's common sense, and our Lord never did this. There was no time during His public ministry for the uttering of platitudes.

It is possible, however, that the practical man may indict this teaching, on the ground that it is unsuited to the needs of ordinary life. It is, however, nothing of the kind. Supposing impecuniosity to be threatening the peace of life, which is the more practical course to adopt, to make provision in a state of anxiety of mind, or in a state of tranquillity ? From the purely business point of view we may suppose that the forethought would be more likely to be

wisely exercised in the latter case than in the former. But there is no doubt that both the objection and the answer lie apart from the meaning and purpose of the great Sermon, except in so far as the fair inference from the words is that we may reasonably test many of our business occupations by thinking if their tendency is to promote or to allay worry. It is impossible to justify the indifferent tone adopted by Christians in speaking of business worries, as if they were simply a misfortune. Judging from these verses we must pronounce them to be a deadly form of sinfulness; all the more so, indeed, if they are the inevitable outcome of an occupation deliberately chosen.

Whatever conduct, therefore, would tend to pacify our minds in the midst of life's uncertainties, would, so far, meet with our Lord's approval. But His disapproval of the unpacified mind is expressed in rather difficult words (v. 25): "Is not the life more than the food, and the body than raiment?" First, it is to be noticed that the forbidden anxiety is on behalf of the physical life and of the body, and then our Lord, so far from speaking of either with contempt as a Stoic would have spoken, reminds His hearers of the exceeding value of both as compared with the secondary objects which are only valuable as they minister to one or the other. But, of course, the answer might be returned that our anxiety about food is due entirely to our conviction of the value of the physical life, our fear of being left without raiment is a fear not on account of the raiment, but of the body which depends on the raiment. How, then, do these words help us, since the value of the physical life, which they emphasise, is already fully appreciated by man; and any menacing of that life perturbs him?

This last form of words, however, requires mending.

In a sense man clings to his physical life as being precious to him, but this is from an unreasoning animal instinct which is quite compatible with a forgetfulness of the real dignity of that life. Such forgetfulness is very widespread. If the marvel of our physical life and of our bodily structure were vividly present to our minds, there could be no such thing as injuring the health with excess of food or other forms of sensuality.¹ Sensuality, indeed, which shows man "thus blindly with his blessedness at strife," even if there were nothing else to be considered, would justify the emphasis of the words, "Is not the life more than the food?" but more is intended. A little consideration of what our physical life means, the mystery with which it is encompassed on every side, its dependence on spirit, its adaptability, the hints we get as to its immortality, these are sufficient to convince man not only that his body is a very beautifully made machine but that it is a gift to him from God wonderful beyond all words to describe, inconceivably beyond his own power to fashion or to sustain, though as to both he has his own necessary part to play. In short, our Lord is once more reminding us that we are recipients of a wondrous gift from God's hand, and the argument is, "If, as you must acknowledge, your physical life is a divine gift, can you not spare yourselves the worry about its maintenance and protection? He who furnished the life will furnish also the necessaries; the greater wonder guarantees the less, and you are not to suppose that God fashioned this wonderful organism in order to see it perish *needlessly*." And however much we may be deceived by the appearance of needlessness, it still remains true that of all ways

¹ The wonders of man's physical life in its delicate relation to the laws of the natural world are admirably set forth in Dr. Wallace's book, "Man's Place in the Universe."

of dealing with the problem, worrying is the most abortive. No undertaking is better carried on because of solicitude or harassing anxiety, and though it be true that the temper which is free from anxiety is sometimes too prone to acquiescence, this does not affect the general truth that the kind of worry which absorbs the mind and robs it of tranquillity has an influence which is wholly injurious and enfeebling.

Thus in the question, “Is not the life more than the food ?” our Lord implies that the perspective in which man views life requires correction ; that is to say, the indulgence in anxiety is either the cause or the outcome of a certain blindness, and so far is again similar to the laying up treasure on earth. This latter we found to be akin to the blindness which results in an attempt to serve two masters ; the anxiety we now see to be akin to a blindness which destroys the true proportion in which life is viewed, so that we easily fall into the delusion that the food is more important than the life which it supports. Yet this is a manifest untruth. Thus the whole subject yields a good instance of law that man has a clear sight of truth but lacks power to apply it. In other words, the large abstract principles on which Christ’s teaching is based are readily perceived ; but man in his conduct of life tends to substitute for them others which he knows to be false, till at last the power of seeing the inconsistency disappears. Our Lord makes His appeal through all His teaching to the minority whose honesty of heart was not yet spoilt by the influence of the hierarchy in Jerusalem.

But the two illustrations, chosen to enforce the opposite truth of God’s care for man, require notice. “Behold the birds of the heaven ;” “Consider the lilies of the field.” It is a mistake to suppose that these enforce the same idea of utter heedlessness as

to the wants of the physical life. As the teaching is concerned with the temper of mind required in the kingdom, the figure of the lilies must have a very indirect application ; and, again, birds cannot be mentioned as instances of living creatures which ignore the claims of the physical life. There is no better instance of unremitting attention to those claims than that afforded by almost any mother bird during the nesting-season ; the day is spent in a ceaseless quest for food, and the bird is a type of strenuous activity directed to a certain end. But it is all to satisfy immediate needs ; the distinguishing characteristic in birds is their complete absorption in the present and disregard of the future. The part they have to play to meet the demands of the one is very exacting, and wonderfully they respond to it. But considering this we find it remarkable that their instinct allows them to leave the future wholly to take care of itself, in the sense that it requires absolutely no provision. Therefore their continued existence affords a singular picture of cheerful unremitting labour for the present day, undisturbed by anxiety for to-morrow, the whole being a revelation to us that we are under the care of a God who is bountiful. Immeasurably great would be the increase of real happiness on earth if all followers of Christ deliberately set themselves to ponder frequently on this parable from nature. As things are we spend a vast amount of time in picturing to each other how pregnant with disaster the future is. The forecasts are mostly falsified, but the important question is, ought they ever to have been made ? Human history affords very scanty evidence of their usefulness ; but even if this were otherwise, for a Christian the ethics of such forecasts do not depend on their usefulness in the affairs of life, but simply on the question how far they disturb our feeling for God

as a Father who provides for His children. This is our Lord's test, and in interpreting His words we must apply no other.

"Are not ye of much more value than they?" These words give a warrant to us for recognising a scale in creation. It might appear as if this estimate were based solely on the status due to men's physical life without reference to his higher endowments of mind and spirit, since only the physical life is here under discussion. But man's complex being cannot be thus partitioned. The welfare of the body is inextricably linked with that of mind and spirit.

Our Lord next reminds us pointedly of the uselessness of worry, the translation of the words which is most coherent being "Which of by being anxious can add one span to his age?" The Greek is certainly ambiguous, and perhaps the difference between the two renderings is not very important, excepting that this one has a special interest. It refers to the paradoxical fact that anxiety to prolong life not only generally fails of its object but embitters the time that the life does last with useless cravings and discontent. It might have been expected that the more we paid attention to our health the better we should be; but, in fact, the exact opposite would be nearer the truth. For while it is easy to be careless of the laws of health, it is still easier to think too much of them and overrate their importance.

The Discourse then passes on to the second great illustration of God's bounty—the lilies of the field. The differences between the two objects chosen are instructive. The fact concerning birds to which attention is directed is that they are kept alive, while we have to notice about lilies that they are beautiful to the eye. We may distinguish them in this way; birds are to us types of exhilarating activity, con-

stantly in motion, constantly uttering sweet sounds, either busy in pursuit of food or singing in sheer enjoyment of vitality, but not torpid ; those at least are their general characteristics. But flowers we think of as emblems of what is stationary and utterly tranquil and quiet, existing, as far as we can tell, mainly to please the eye. The birds are active, therefore God feeds them ; flowers are lovely, therefore God clothes them, in each case exercising lavish bounty to secure that the living thing shall fulfil its natural function. But what, then, about man ? His function is not to add beauty to the natural world simply by living a natural instinctive life, but to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness, knowing that his Creator will not allow his spiritual efforts to be spoilt by the physical life failing for want of support. In other words, we have to do with a Heavenly Father who is a God of bounty and loving-kindness, and who having regard to the purpose of each created thing's existence, gives without stint what is necessary for that purpose to be achieved. This, of course, ignores exceptions and abnormalities of all kinds, but there is no mistaking the main drift of the teaching. Therefore for human beings to allow themselves to be seriously fretted about the needs of the lower life is to take a wrong view not only of God, but also of their own place and function in creation ; thirdly, we might add, it impedes the higher activities, undermining confidence, absorbing and distracting strength and generally causing life to be ineffective. Nature, on the other hand, reveals the law of God's dealings, that where the object in view is connected with appearance, the provision made for it by God is lavish and wonderfully successful, but not in any way dependent on the toil and effort of the creature.

A difficulty however arises with regard to a subsidiary illustration introduced in ver. 30. What is meant by "grass"? The tone is apparently contemptuous, and the use of the word translated "but" at the beginning is not what we should have expected. The word for grass would ordinarily mean "provender," but here is used widely with reference to the fact that common vegetables and plants were used in Palestine for fuel. There seems therefore to be a connexion as follows: Birds exhibit beauty of motion and utter sweet sounds, hence they must be fed; lilies exist mainly as ornament, hence they must be clothed. But they belong to the class of common plants which are ephemeral in their lives and very soon are worthless except for fuel; and yet God clothes them with great richness. See therefore how God provides that these humble objects of His creative power should fulfil their existence. Why, then, should man be anxious about the necessities of his lower life? He has a far higher *raison d'être*, and God will secure for him the means of fulfilling it. "O ye of little faith." Our Lord's hearers were not among those who utterly discarded this principle of life. For those He has no message, but He speaks to those who could not help recognising it, yet in their own lives acted upon it feebly.

One or two questions arise here. Are we to restrict the warning to a limited form of anxiety, namely, that which is concerned only with life's necessities? The answer depends on the principle assumed in the warning, and how far it is of wide application. We have seen that it is based on the idea of a trust in God's fatherhood being powerful enough to uphold men in the midst of the most perturbing problems and bewilderment. Now if this trust is all important with regard to the special anxieties under discussion,

it must be so with regard to others ; and it would be inconsistent with the method adopted by our Lord to restrict the application of the principle to the particular instances which He happens to select. The exceeding gravity of the warning becomes apparent when we extend our thoughts to human life at large, and think of all the numerous causes of that anxious foreboding which is ordinarily assumed to be right and reasonable, though when we meet with a character which is free from it we cannot withhold our admiration. Whatever ardent wish we may form for a particular kind of success, in some undeniably useful undertaking, or for the prosperity, in the best sense, of some institution with which we are connected, or in some disinterested effort to spread God's Word abroad, or to promote the good of those most near and dear to us, in all of these and many more there may come a time when the evidence of what is ordinarily called failure grows upon our view and darkens more and more of our horizon. It is taken for granted, then, no matter what may be the teaching of the great Sermon, that anxiety deep enough to prey upon the spirits and enfeeble our vigour is not only natural but almost laudable, so far are we removed from the principles of Christ's teaching. That is just the moment for us to remember that that kind of uneasy misgiving as to what is coming is a sign of flat disobedience to one of our Lord's most emphatic warnings, and is to treat His supreme divine example with a studied disregard.

The lesson conveyed is indicated by the exact meaning of the Greek word for anxiety, which by its derivation signifies "something which distracts or divides," and we have to ask what does it divide, and from what ? According to the whole tenor of the

discourse there may be two appropriate meanings. By indulging in anxiety about his earthly welfare man divides himself from God, or, perhaps more appropriately still, he destroys his own singleness of mind and aim. It is a sign that he is not single-minded in his wish to fulfil God's will simply ; if he were, he would long ago have learnt that God's scheme for him and his best efforts may very probably include failure as it is ordinarily reckoned. Whichever of these two meanings be preferred, the word chosen is remarkably suggestive, only we cannot be sure that there was any one word in Aramaic which corresponded at all closely. The hint of man destroying his own single-mindedness reminds us, that when man allows himself to be absorbed in earthly concerns the result is not a single-minded devotion to the wrong thing but a double-minded wavering between the true and the false, showing that do what he will he cannot cut himself off "from God who is our home." This at least is the view of the New Testament writers, and it is full of deep suggestion.

Verse 31, as rendered in English, might give the impression that the warning is against a luxurious fastidiousness in food and clothing. But apart from the fact that the Greek word *ποῖον* would be required, the sudden plunge into that subject would destroy the unity of the paragraph altogether, and introduce a warning against a well-understood folly, which it was never Christ's practice to give.

" For after all these things do the Gentiles seek ; " that is to say, there must be some difference between the "nations" and the chosen people which explains the fact that the former are naturally immersed in mundane matters, but the latter, from their superior knowledge of God and nearness to Him, are called

to something higher. And if this be the case with the chosen people, how much more with the members of Christ's kingdom ? Or are the words to be restricted to the latter ? In this case there would be a distinction drawn between the followers of Christ and the Gentiles which is not found elsewhere, and which, considering the course of events in the future, seems somewhat unnatural.

The tone of the closing words is full of sympathy and consideration for mankind, and ought to make it quite plain that the warnings are meant to guide us to what is really practical, to save man from fretting himself idly and injuriously *before* the trouble comes. Tenderly the Saviour appears to contradict His own warnings by foretelling that there will be anxiety when the day comes. This is, of course, one of the imitable touches of sympathy in Christ's discourses. He had just said, "Be not anxious," but well He knew, that as long as human hearts can bleed and human eyes can weep at the thought of sufferings, there must be anxiety. None the less the injunction that this feeling should be checked till the moment of trial actually comes is exceedingly weighty and important. Why should poor harassed men and women add to the inevitable suffering the pains of useless foreboding ?

There remains yet one point. We have seen that the warnings against this particular infirmity, though connected with the two necessities of life—food and clothing—yet undoubtedly extend to all worldly care and needless forecast. But there is one kind of solicitude which to many natures is the most harassing of all, viz., the misgivings concerning the state of the heart. Especially after understanding the tremendous gravity of Christ's words as to the deep essential need of purity of motive and single-mindedness, a struggling

follower may well find himself haunted by misgiving on this subject. Is his inmost character improving? Can he mark any progress during the last few years?

It is not difficult to discern a distinction between this kind of anxiety and any other. View them as we like, all other objects of worried and perturbed thought are earthly in their character, transitory, and of importance only because they apparently are necessities of existence. Such are food and clothing, the certainty of fairly regular employment under healthy conditions of life, and so forth. Then there are many other subjects which provoke anxiety connected chiefly with the opinion others form of us, our general reputation as people who can do adequately what we have been set to do. This large class of subjects might be shown to be productive of anxiety in proportion to the amount of error and worldliness in our view of human existence. We can all feel that if our minds were as "other-worldly" as they ought to be, and might be, most of our concern for such a thing as reputation would immediately disappear. The truth of many of the reflections in Ps. xlix. would be felt, and, in short, the feeling for eternity would alter completely our ideas of the importance of these and other common objects of care. But when we come to consider our own character-growth and that of those who have been specially committed to our care—our children, for instance—one longs to know definitely how far our Lord would have countenanced anxiety on such a point. Here is no ephemeral desire for some possessions which most of us know we should be better without, and which moralists of all ages and countries unite in warning us against as being full of danger to those who grasp at them, and only innocuous to those who despise them; but rather a deep consideration for that portion of our being which we know to be

immortal, the welfare of which is known to suffer immeasurably from *want* of thought and solicitude, and about which over and over again our Lord has taught us that the one superlatively important thing in human life is the state of the soul which may this night be demanded of us, the question whether the salt has lost or is losing its savour. Now, it surely is too much to demand that mortal men and women, with immortality stretching before them, but to be preceded by the great and terrible fact of Divine judgment, should be free from anxiety on such subjects as this. There would seem to be something almost startlingly unnatural about any such requirement, and yet if one kind of anxiety divides us from God, it is not easy to see how any other kind can be wholly free from harm.

The full consideration of this question would perhaps belong more appropriately to St. Paul's well-known injunction, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." But there is one answer to be gathered directly from the context of our Lord's warning. Students of His teaching have observed how dim and scanty are His revelations to us of the future; and it is of interest to observe how little attention He pays to the history of man's past, except by way of occasional illustration. But how urgent and inexhaustibly rich are His references to the importance of the present! Thus it is no matter for surprise to find that in this very passage, and when cautioning His followers against anxiety, He lays emphasis on "the morrow." Whatever may be wrong or dangerous about anxiety generally, we can easily see that it is its prematurity that constitutes much of its foolishness. So in the matter of anxiety about character development. There is obviously a difference between the kind of solicitude which

makes a man diligently seize every opportunity of doing right as it presents itself, and the tendency to speculate nervously on the kind of person he may be in ten years' time. The former is behaviour which strengthens us; the latter would be fatally weakening. Therefore, anxiety about character may at once be said to be dangerous if it peers into the future. But if it inspires a strong resolve to leave no stone unturned to "make our calling and election sure," to see that nothing impedes our striving, and that inclination has less and less place in determining our line of conduct, it is then entirely wholesome and in conformity with the principles which have guided the lives of countless Christian heroes. This is tantamount to saying that while we injure ourselves by examining the results of our self-discipline, it is our bounden duty to see that it be thorough. There is something introspective and curiously weakening in the practice of prying into results, especially of our moral and spiritual efforts. For this reason the scientific instinct of recording and tabulating sometimes threatens to injure simplicity. But we may be sure that such measures of self-discipline as we find ourselves bound to take will not be due to anxiety, nor add to it, if they are the outcome of insight into the true proportion of life's claims, and the meaning of the present moment. When our Divine Master said "It is finished," He did not mean that what we call success was gained, but that nothing had been left undone. This is the only true achievement which lies properly within the scope of our responsibility.

XXIII

JUDGING OTHERS

vii. 1-5

THE most obvious difficulty in these words is yet very easy to overlook; what is the necessary connexion between judging and being judged? In what sense is it true that immunity from being judged depends on abstinence from the practice of judging? Further, we are reminded that there is a difference between corporate and individual judging. Does the prohibition extend to both? Is it also absolute and unqualified? And, finally, what is the judgment with which we are threatened if we disobey this injunction, the judgment by men, or by God, or by both? Perhaps there is no moral precept quite so short which contains so much food for reflection.

“That ye be not judged.” This expression points towards judgment for sin under certain circumstances being remitted, under others remaining. Clearly, judgment by God remains to be looked for by those whose sin is not repented of, and if sin is not perceived there can be no repentance. The answer, therefore, to the first question seems to lie here. The habit of judging others is hardly compatible with self-knowledge, for the simple reason that if a man really knows his own faults he is indisposed to be severe on others, having learnt to abhor faults, and also the immense difficulty of a thorough re-

formation. Hence, sharp-sightedness for others' shortcomings generally means blindness to one's own ; and that is a fatal bar to repentance.

But this statement demands some discrimination. It seems to assume that judging is much the same as condemning, whereas there is a faculty of perception and insight into character which, so far from being a fruit of a hard unrepentant heart, is rather the symptom of a growth in goodness, and of experience in battling with temptation. Can it be supposed that the exercise of this faculty is forbidden ? We seem driven back on the difference between the spoken and the unspoken judgment. Granted that the faculty of insight into character is a high and noble one, yet the propensity to note failings and pronounce upon them, or, keeping more strictly to the meaning of judging, the habit of scrutinising and classifying the qualities of another, is open to many objections. It may be indicted as leading into error, or simply as betokening an unpleasant tone of mind. But our Lord forbids it as indicating a want of true repentance ; for a man who indulges in this habit is heedless as to his own relation to God ; he cannot have made peace with Him, or else the knowledge so acquired of the burden of sin would prevent him from laying bare, or even giving close attention to, the infirmities of others. The heathen poet was not far from this truth in the line :—

“ Non ignara mali miseris succurrere disco,”

seeing that the worst way of helping any one is to show that you have scrutinised his faults of character. Christ lifts the whole subject higher by showing that the practice here forbidden denotes a wrong relation to God. And it is worth noticing how we are restricted to an interpretation which takes account of this rela-

tion to God by comparing the jejune maxim of prudence, which is all that can be made out if the judgment threatened here is only man's judgment. It would be perfectly true to say that the tendency to note and label the qualities of others brings upon a man that very criticism to which he is himself inclined. A cannot dissect B's character without inviting others to dissect his, especially if there is anything merciless in his own pronouncements. But if this is all that Christ meant, it is a simple appeal to self-interest, instead of being a profound truth of revelation which absorbs and justifies to some extent the human instinct of repulsion towards this practice—a repulsion invariably felt by thoroughly healthy natures.

Thus the prohibition becomes intelligible. It is, however, very striking in its context, referring, as it seems to, to the evil of the world mentioned in the concluding words of the last chapter. It is as if Christ had been dwelling on the fact of the existence of evil with the object of showing what was to be the right attitude of His followers towards it. The last chapter gives at length one important precept: Do not let it make you anxious beforehand. This chapter opens with the next great rule: Do not judge it.

When contrasted with the text, "Judge not according to appearances, but judge righteous judgment" (John vii. 24), the words afford a striking example of Christ's method of saying one thing at a time and leaving His hearers to correlate different aspects of truth. Hitherto we have been considering the word "judge" as if it were restricted to the verdicts men pass on each other; this is, no doubt, an important application of the word, but the text in St. John leaves us free to think of a wider sense. There Christ was warning against a hasty

and superficial estimate of the right and wrong of a particular line of conduct, an attitude, an interpretation of God's law as shown in His healing a sufferer on the Sabbath day. Now, the central meaning of the word is "separate," and as we use it, it conveys the notion of separating good from evil, which is exactly what we try to do when we make up our minds as to such a thing as a political or social movement, or, a tendency in human thought, speculation and public opinion. The startling thing in the prohibition (Matt. vii. 1) is the unrestricted character of the application; it seems to warn us against all hasty conclusions as a moral fault, and, no doubt, the more complex and important a question is, the more of guilt attaches to the judging by first impressions according to appearances, and when we sin in this way about the character of our neighbour, we sin against the law of love. In a case like a political question the offence is a moral weakness, a readiness to be led by deceptive appearances which deceive the multitude, and cause conventional opinion to be always inadequate if not erroneous. In both passages is there not a warning against any kind of hasty positive conclusion? Clearly there is, unless the application be restricted in John vii. 24 to the immediate circumstances; but it cannot be denied that the connexion of the two clauses in Matt. vii. 1 is still more difficult to seize if the application is general than if it be only to harsh judgments on character.

The contexts, however, though they differ in Matthew and Luke, seem to warrant the main application of the words to the judging of our neighbour's character and actions. The righteous judgment spoken of in the fourth Gospel is evidently some sort of conclusion different from such as are usually formed on appearances, that is deliberate, not necessarily conventional,

but resting on deep principles. In both of the chief objects of men's judgments, each other's character, or some social movement, there is room for the law of love to have full play. The Christian spirit believes good to exist either in a fellow-man or a society as long as it is possible to do so (1 Cor. xiii. 5). And experience shows us that keen-sightedness for faults is powerless to lift towards reformation. This thought forms a connexion with the parable of the mote and the beam ; but first we have to notice the emphatic assertion of the law of requital. The measure that we deal to our fellow-men will in some sense determine the measure God will deal to us.

This law is stated by each of the first three Evangelists. In St. Luke and probably in St. Matthew it is applied only to man's measuring out kindness and forgiveness to his neighbour. But St. Mark (iv. 24) teaches, in connexion with it, that opportunities will be considered in the final judgment ; men will be held responsible for the knowledge which was placed within their reach. As regards moral conduct, however, the great words apply only to the virtue of a forgiving or kindly temper and the opposite. And they point to the final judgment, for, as to this life, Luke vi. 35 shows that God partly suspends the law, and in so doing affords us an example of forbearance. But the final requital is terribly pourtrayed in the parable of the Unmerciful Servant, and elsewhere. We learn from St. Luke that it will be due to all species of unkindness, including that of the habit of critical estimate of other men ; from St. Matthew, that it belongs to that habit alone (perhaps to other rash judgments).

Thus we find ourselves endowed with a faculty which must be kept in the sternest control, and yet has frequently to be used. Some insight into char-

acter must be employed, and consequently some judgment must be passed whenever men are selected for any kind of organised service. But probably it is in the matter of conversation where the temptation to the abuse of the faculty is most pressing. Whenever we utter severe judgments on other men couched in racy or sarcastic language, the fact that we are injuring a neighbour who is not present to defend himself is forgotten: simply because we are adding salt to our conversation. The pungency of such talk banishes dullness for a while, but all the time he who so offends is causing the Divine judgment to be laid up in store for himself in strictly proportionate severity, not only for the harsh and heedless words, but because it is thereby made clear that his own relation to God is wrong; he has not learnt the beginnings of humility or repentance. By healthy-minded men also a native instinct of abhorrence is felt for this practice, if the memory of the lately dead is thus violated; less markedly in the case of the living; while as regards prominent public characters long passed away, it is commonly held that much liberty of judgment is allowed. In general, it may be said the habit of noting the good in our neighbours, and being at least reticent concerning the evil, is required of us by God more urgently than perhaps any other duty which we owe to each other.

XXIV

THE MOTE AND THE BEAM¹

vii. 3, 4, 5

IT seems advisable to separate these three verses from the preceding, as they are in another context in St. Luke, though it would not be difficult to conceive of them as spoken in the same discourse, and as connected in the main idea. The scrutinising of our neighbour's character would thus be condemned for a new reason, viz., the beam in our own eye. The parable, however, is a whole by itself, and we first notice that ver. 3 condemns one thing, vers. 4 and 5 something different. And in ver. 3 *βλέπεις* and *κατανοεῖς* are carefully used with different meanings. But whether the parable is isolated or not, there is an important question to be settled : Why is it apparently assumed that he who regards his neighbour's tiny fault is labouring under a huge one of his own ? So far, we have had no hint that the critical attitude towards others is adopted generally by those who themselves are great sinners, and our curiosity is stirred to know whether the prohibition in vers. 1 and 2 is based on this assumption ; or, on the other hand, are those people who are fairly free from grave faults themselves allowed to be critical towards others ?

A little reflection will show that if our Lord's teach-

¹ For further notes on this passage, see the Appendix on the word "H pocrite."

ing is treated in this spirit we may easily land ourselves in crude Pharisaic distinctions. A Pharisee would try to measure the degree of blamelessness at which a man may be justified in being a judge of others, and the very object of the use of paradox and parable would be lost. The true answer to the question is that, as simply judging without warrant is an offence against the law of love, so this scrutinising of a neighbour's almost invisible blemishes is the same, an invariable outcome of the unloving spirit; and any fault compared to an unloving temper is like a mote compared to a beam. He who *notices* (carefully looks at) his brother's mote shows *ipso facto* that he has a beam of his own.¹

¹ We should notice in passing the truthfulness of this picture as regards the taking out of the mote. Men frequently attempt the task with disastrous results, but there is no record in the Gospels of Christ doing anything similar, though on one or two occasions an opportunity for doing so seemed favourable. Compare Luke xxii. 61, xix. 5, xviii. 16 with Mark ix. 36, Matt. xxiii. 13 *seqq.*

XXV

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

vii. 6

THIS precept is quite without context, and is not recorded elsewhere. Yet it is in the tone of the Sermon. It will be remembered that in regard to the virtues of prayer, almsgiving, and fasting, our Lord assumes them, and gives warning against their being wrongly practised. So here He assumes that His disciples, having received, will be eager to give—perhaps too eager; and shows that the law must be observed that some spiritual hunger in the hearers should be a first condition of readiness to impart to them that which is holy. We see the observance of the rule in His own dealing with the masses, especially in the use of parables, and indeed this very Sermon is full of instances of deep spiritual truth being veiled under images, paradoxes, and similitudes. The wish to impart, which He here ascribes to His hearers, is the first and most essential characteristic of an ordained minister of the Gospel. It has been mentioned by a great authority¹ as the symptom of the “call” to pastoral work, and indispensable to any conscientious undertaking of such work. But a preacher soon finds out that in modern conditions of preaching to congregations composed of the ignorant and spiritually apathetic, along with the

¹ Dr. Hort.

well-taught and eager listeners, the difficulty of obeying the precept is most acute. We have, it is true, our Lord's example by way of guidance, but, apart from other differences, the Jews, whatever their faults, were not apathetic in religious matters (cf. Rom. x. 2).

The words also imply that Christ discountenances such impediments to the progress of Christian teaching as spring from blundering, want of tact, over-hastiness, ignorance of human nature, while He gives abundant warning, on the other hand, that the most cautious efforts to spread the Word, if the attempt is genuinely made, are sure to provoke opposition (cf. John xvi. 2 reff. with Matt. x. 16 reff.).

A difficult question on a very different topic arises out of this detached verse. It gives a vivid picture of some one inclined to throw some valuable object before wild hogs threatening to attack him, and finding that it only delays their onset for a moment, while they trample under foot the precious thing intended to satisfy them, and coming on more fiercely than before, rend him. Does this refer to the Christian missionary's dealings with the heathen, or to a teacher's difficulties *within* the Christian society, the Church? Opinions are sometimes expressed to the effect that our Lord, like many other teachers, intended some of His doctrines to be esoteric, confined always to an inner circle, while parabolic or veiled utterances were to be the staple food of the majority. And it is not difficult to see that natural indolence, which often discourages progress in knowledge of doctrine, may be inclined to justify itself by some such theory. Theological verities are often expressed in such obscure language that a man who has not been trained in processes of abstract thought is not unlikely to think that, whatever may be the value of such truths, they lie outside the

horizon of his mind, and that he may reasonably acquiesce in total ignorance of them for his whole life long.¹ Those, however, who favour this interpretation as regards themselves must be prepared to be classified as dogs or swine by our Lord—terms of the utmost contempt. Moreover, the emphatic and beautiful likeness of an unbeliever to a child reminds us that one of the prominent characteristics of childhood is *growth*, and the figure is incompatible with mental stagnation. Lastly, in the whole picture given us of Apostolic action in the early Church, there is no trace of any teaching being withheld from the humblest member of the community. Our Lord's parables were not a keeping back of the truth, but the perfect adaptation of it to immature, ignorant, and suspicious minds.

We are thus led to conclude that the precept does not enjoin reservation of truth by Christian teachers as a policy within the Church. It remains that its primary application must be to missionary work undertaken by the Church to those outside. And this is indicated also by the picturesque image of the swine turning and rending him who inopportunely offers them precious things. Such words do not describe the result of teaching within the Church, but the fierce hostility roused among the heathen, and aggravated in proportion to the holiness of the truths imparted. Of course, there is need of wisdom and tact in one case as in the other ; and it is clear that even within the Christian society bad blood is stirred by ill-judged attempts to force sacred truths into minds not prepared to receive it. But as compared

¹ A text which may be taken to support this view is Mark iv. 11. But "those that are without" need not mean those who are debarred from entry through no fault of their own. Why not "those who might enter but will not"? Cf. John v. 40; Luke xix. 42, xiii. 34.

with the result on outsiders as testified to by missionaries, the opposition is mainly that of inert resistance ; it gains in activity the more the membership of the listeners is merely nominal. And it is a grim truth that the worldly spirit, wherever it exists, may be goaded to active hostility to Christ by any urgent insistence on His claims. Both sets of truths, the wisdom in avoiding the danger, and the unique courage of outspokenness in facing it, are often exemplified in our Lord's ministry.

The expression "that which is holy" should not be restricted to teaching. The society which Christ founded was commissioned to impart to the world that which is perfectly described in these words, *viz.* the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself. And the awfulness of the resultant evils can best be measured in this connexion. Premature or light-hearted distribution of so holy a gift leads first to a contempt being shown to God Himself, then to a manifestation of rage against His ministers, terrible not because it brings suffering upon them, but inasmuch as it reveals and confirms the spirit of hatred and gives expression to enmity against the divine. And, further, if we picture to ourselves a man anxious to stave off the onset of wild animals by throwing to them that which for a moment looks like ordinary food, but is in reality useless for this purpose, we learn the secret of the antagonism. Carnal minds are influenced by carnal appetites.

At first sight the teaching concerning the Kingdom of God seemed to many to offer something likely to satisfy earthly aspirations, but the truths delivered were found to be useless for this purpose ; and so man, who often takes a swinish view of such things, in rabid disappointment, after scrutinising what is offered him, turns and attacks the minister, as if he

had defrauded him in a time of need with sham victuals. His wrath is fierce because the fare is so precious.

But as soon as ever we clearly perceive this twofold aspect of ministerial duty, the necessity for caution and the need for unflinching courage, we are reminded of the paralysing uncertainty which affects much of human endeavour as to where and when and how is such a precept as the one under discussion to be observed ; and we ask ourselves if Christ's teaching is open to the same fatal objection as is felt against such a teacher, for instance, as Carlyle, when he tells us that toleration beyond a certain point is a vice, but leaves it uncertain where the point is. The answer is that if we isolate such precepts as this one from our Lord's life and example, we deprive them of all power for guidance to our lives. He showed mankind again and again how He acted under the personal guidance of His Heavenly Father in the application of these broad principles of conduct. This close personal communion was to Him of such transcendent importance that we cannot wonder when we find it constantly assumed in His teaching. Indeed, the more we feel the want of something supplementary to the precepts of the new dispensation, the better they are fulfilling the purpose of quickening men's sense of need.¹

¹ The whole of St. John vi. is a commentary on these words, and shows how the precept is itself liable sometimes to be overridden. Christ had to deal with a terribly difficult situation. The result of His bounty to the five thousand was a clamorous and carnal enthusiasm (vv. 24, 27), and to check it He had recourse to the very expedient which in Matt. vii. 6 is discountenanced. The holiest and most sublime teaching is given to men who, with very few exceptions, were certain to misunderstand it, and to be changed from willing learners into apathetic or active antagonists. Another instance is Luke xxii. 69, only it is to be observed that on both occasions the divineness of the truths uttered is, so to speak, tempered to the human mind by being presented through the Person of the

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human Mediator. There is a difference between any claim made by our Lord as to Himself while on earth, and the giving of the Holy Spirit to the unworthy. One of the functions of the Son of Man was to translate the divine offer into something intelligible to mankind, and yet so to veil it in His own humanity that men unable to receive it might be spared the guilt of railing blasphemously against "the holy thing," which might have been offered to them simply as something free from all human admixture, and able to be seen at once to be divine.

XXVI

ASK AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN

vii. 7-12

THE first point to be observed here is that Christ insists on one line of action in answer to the question elsewhere worded: "Lord, what must I do to be saved?" He notes the universal need, and though knowing man's readiness to try various devices for raising himself, yet in this paragraph one principle only is affirmed, to the exclusion of all others. Men desirous of conquering an infirmity or acquiring some power are not unwilling to take a great deal of trouble, sometimes to the point of severe self-discipline or prolonged self-culture. Christ says, "Ask, seek, knock, and it will not be in vain." The first verb gives us the idea of a gift promised not to effort, but by the grace of God. The second reminds us that nevertheless an effort on our part is demanded—the effort of continued eagerness; the gift is not to be earned or claimed as a right or manufactured by our own skill, but simply found. The third verb speaks of the aspirant desirous of having impediments removed. He is told again to rely on some one removing them at his appeal. In all three there is a Presence and a Person hinted at, though by the use of the passive voice in each of the second verbs Christ seems first to give expression to a law, viz. that success is proportionate to endeavour; but to

safeguard this against an impersonal secular sense the figure is drawn out explicitly in the following verses.

The teaching is, however, strictly in the form of a precept, then a law, then an illustration from human life. In the threefold precept the tenses used are the same ; present imperative, and future. But in the statement of the law the present tense is used twice, and the future once. Thus “he that asketh receiveth ; he that seeketh findeth ; to him that knocketh it *shall be* opened.” Is there any reason why the removal of impediments should be spoken of as still in the future ? The text might have run “to him that knocketh, the door is opened.” There may be an indication that in the spiritual life the process of receiving attends closely on the act of asking, and is not separable from it in point of time. Earnest prayer is in a sense its own answer. Similarly, all endeavour of search after God or after goodness is its own reward, in that an immeasurable gain results from the mere search : the seeker finds while he seeks. But the opening of the door is a figure which expresses not only the removal of an impediment, but also the entry into a house or other building : some place, anyhow, entry into which is desired. This gives us a hint why the future tense is used. Impediments in the spiritual life are slow of removal. They block and obstruct long long after we are first conscious of them. As, for instance, in the case of a tendency to wandering thoughts in prayer : many a petitioner has to endure for life the feeling of kneeling, as it were, in the vestibule of some lit-up palace, entry into which, as well as a sight of its interior, is barred to him, and he has to continue praying on in a kind of spiritual darkness and silence, till of a sudden the obstacle is taken away and a flood of glory and

warmth streams over him : "It shall be opened." Or it may be that the opening is delayed till the end of what we call life ; as some impediments are only removed by death, and the removal of them is like the entering into the King's palace. The prospect is suggestive of freedom, glory and welcome, but we should notice that though couched in language of the future it is instinct with the idea of the present. It is not said that there will be an opening unless there has first been a knocking.

In the following verses, which give the illustration from human life, it is assumed that we, through our higher feelings, can conceive of God's attributes. Ethical man looks towards God, obeying the very instincts which must have been implanted by Him. Thus a man's natural conduct towards a son (*vīos* emphasises the legal position of a son, *τέκνον* = the offspring who receives the same life) implies the recognition of an obligation not discerned by beasts, higher by far than the parental instinct which in the animal kingdom stimulates fostering care, but dies away as soon as the young can fend for themselves. This instinct in animals is the satisfying of an unthinking desire ; but in man there is the recognition of the claims of a spiritual being, of the training of character and of guidance far on into life. Christ points to this ethical perception as to something divine existing in man though he is "evil" (*πονηρός*, corrupt), and from it (ye *know* how to give) we may infer that God much more will give (contrast *οἴδατε δίδοντας* with *δώσει*).

There is, however, a significant reticence with regard to *what* the asker will receive. The answer to prayer is often not the thing asked for, but, what is far better, the power to bear the refusal with undiminished trust and with no tendency to faint-

heartedness. The example of our Lord in the garden of Gethsemane illuminates these words. The actual request was not granted, but an angel came and ministered to Him. It is to be noticed, however, that as a parallel to the "good gifts" which men bestow on their children, the promise is that God will give "good things" to those who ask. St. Matthew leaves the promise very broad; but St. Luke gives instead the striking variation, "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him" (R.V.). True prayer, even if apparently not answered, cannot fail to bring us nearer God; it teaches us conformity to His will, and in itself it is the gift of the Spirit, just as the gift which results from it is also the reception of a more abundant endowment of the same spirit. The Third Person of the Holy Trinity inspires the prayer (Rom. viii. 15) and comes to the petitioner as its reward.

XXVII

THE STRAIT GATE AND NARROW WAY

vii. 13, 14

THE difficulties that crop up when these verses are fairly looked at are indeed numerous ; and they force on us the important question, how far is the general interpretation to be restricted to the exact parabolic expressions or drawn from the less definite associations of the words ? What is the picture ? A narrow gate, leading into what ? Led up to by a narrow road or path, hemmed in by what ? And our ideas of the passage are seriously encumbered by a loose reminiscence of a somewhat similar saying in St. Luke (xiii. 34), which presents quite different difficulties of its own.

Many quotations of the words are made on the assumption that the expression “narrow way” means a way difficult to travel on, arduous, painful. But clearly there is no warrant for this. “Steep” would have been the word used in this connexion, and “narrow” must not suggest to us more than “hard to find” and “hard to keep when found.” So, too, the “narrow gate” suggests a gate easy to miss ; not one which will only let in a very few travellers at a time. For, in St. Matthew at any rate, there is not the least hint of many passengers trying to force their way into some palace or rich man’s ground. The idea would be quite inapplicable here as well as grotesque in

itself. The expression "few there be that find it" warns us against imagining that the difficulties belonging to the narrow way, or the narrow gate, are due to anything like a crowd. Therefore it must denote some course of life hard to find and hard to keep, but marked out for us to follow if we are to escape destruction. Again, it is tempting to ask, what is the relation of the broad and narrow ways to each other? As soon as the wayfaring man strays from the latter is he to be pictured as inevitably joining the throng on the former? Once again, "Many there be which go in thereat." Whither are these tending? Are they wishful to gain the door, or have they abandoned themselves to a broad and easy road, knowing of whither it leads? In the former case they belong to the large class who say with Balaam, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his," but meantime are unable seriously to consider whether the life they are leading is likely so to end. It is probable that this is the kind of character intended; but certainly the emphasis of the parable is on the expression "narrow way," and to that we must give our attention.¹

The word "narrow" suggests the difference between a track or laid path and the ground that lies on each side of it. The "narrow way" denotes a way off which the traveller may easily walk, and the difference to him then is that he has to go on without guidance

¹ There are some ambiguities in the Greek which should be cleared up, though there is nothing specially important in them. It is doubtful if $\dot{\eta}$ $\pi\acute{u}\lambda\eta$ should be read in ver. 13, and from ver. 14 it is omitted in some minor MSS. The text, however, goes on to indicate a certain identity in point of importance between the gate and the way, the $\delta\iota$ $a\acute{u}\tau\acute{h}\eta$ referring equally well to either. Similarly at the end of ver. 14, $a\acute{u}\tau\acute{h}\eta$, as far as sense goes, could refer to $\pi\acute{u}\lambda\eta$ or $\delta\delta\acute{o}s$ or $\zeta\omega\acute{h}$ —by position it ought to refer to the latter, only then the parallelism with ver. 13 would be lost, where $\delta\iota$ $a\acute{u}\tau\acute{h}\eta$ cannot refer to $\alpha\pi\omega\lambda\eta\eta\alpha$.

or beaten track, over ground which is dangerously like the path to look at, but is found to fail when attempted. This would be either because it is soft and treacherous, or because it leads nowhere. Now, if the main drift of the Sermon be taken into account, and the tremendous emphasis it lays on the danger of a false conception of duty rather than on the need of being dutiful, we seem to be guided to the notion of life being a progress beset continuously by deceptive influences, but guided by something like a main principle which, if we choose to observe it, will keep us from straying into error and aimlessness, and will give us the sense of being led homewards straight to our journey's end. And in strict accordance with the spirit of the two opening chapters of the Sermon, our attention is drawn to the fact that this principle, though known and recognised by all, is very easy indeed to lose.

In startling contrast to this, the parable describes another way of ordering life, which, like a broad road thronged with companions, presents no difficulty either on the score of danger of straying or from lack of society. Nothing is said as to the relation between this road and the other, else it might have been taught that the straying from the narrow path inevitably lands the pilgrim into the broad road. But true though that may be in fact, the shape of the parable forbade its inclusion in the teaching, so that it does not concern us here. Again, emphasis might have been laid upon the loneliness of the narrow path, compared with the broad way crowded with "many," and we may suppose that Christ mentioned the fact of the disparity of numbers to guard His disciples against discouragement. Man is gregarious, and instinctively finds strength and support in the fact of companionship. None the less, he may be sure that

if he allows this instinct to determine the way in which he orders his life he will go wrong. Of companionship on the wrong road he will have plenty; on the right road it is not promised.

When we gain a fairly clear idea of the picture of the two roads, we are surprised that our Lord does not enjoin upon us the need of choosing the right road, thereby enforcing the importance of a wise deliberation now while we have the chance of choosing. But the imperative is "Enter ye in by the narrow gate"; and our thoughts are vigorously directed, not towards the pilgrimage of life, but to its close. Hence the terrific import of the words, "And many be they that enter in thereby," which read almost as if the Speaker were actually watching the throngs pressing in through the gate which leads not to "life" but to "destruction." (The phrase is altered in the parallel clause, where the difficulty of finding the narrow way (or gate) is mentioned, which difficulty in the case of the broad way would not exist.) This remains, then, one of the very rare instances in which Christ speaks of the future rather than of the present.

And now we have to ask, what kind of life is signified by the narrow and broad way respectively? It is very doubtful if the answer is intended to be very clear cut, but there can be no doubt as to its main sense. The chief characteristic of the pilgrimage of those on the broad way is the ease of it in respect of knowing what and where the road is. We call up images of a handful of wayfarers on the other road carefully picking out the track, but perpetually liable to lose it by straying over its edge on this side or on that, because it is so narrow. But the majority, who have chosen the other road, have no trouble in keeping to it. They have nothing to do but to drift. The breadth of the road prevents

them from straying, while the multitude of companions bears them along in a vast current almost irresistible ; and when they come to the gate, it is so wide that they are hardly aware of their passing under its portal till they are on the far side, about which nothing whatever is told us. This must be a picture of a life spent in conformity with the world. Its main feature as compared with the other is its heedlessness ; for on a narrow path the traveller must continually take heed where he sets his steps, else he wanders off the track, there being but a few fellow-travellers to help him with their guidance. Here we have a picture of a life lived by some principle not commonly recognised but obeyed by a small minority. It is never so easy to put into words the secret of the true life as it is to show the meaning of the conventional. In Scripture the problems are more intelligible to us than their solutions, one of which in the Book of Job, for instance, we eagerly wait for, but when it comes we hardly understand it.

But, taking the drift of the Sermon as far as it has been defined, we can hardly be wrong in seeing in the vivid expression "the narrow way" the figure of the life of sonship to a Heavenly Father. It is a life which for its safe conduct requires heedfulness and movement ; but the main fact indicated is the liability to lose hold of the leading principle and substitute some other without knowing. In almost infinite variety the world presses its invitations upon us. At one time the single-hearted servant of the Most High is scorned and insulted, but anon the very conduct for which he was derided is the subject of praise and flattery ; so that he is reminded of the words of the ancient poet, "With the flatterers were busy mockers," and he wonders which of the two threaten the more grievous thraldom—the world's approbation or its

contempt. It does not take many years of trying to live the life of sonship, as recipients of life and in tranquil trust, for men to discover that it is a life which may be very easily corrupted and spoilt unawares, but that as long as it is faithfully followed it gives its own evidence of unerring progress towards a distant goal.¹

¹ If we turn to St. Luke xiii. 24 the striking difference in the handling of the figure will suggest some useful thoughts. There the parable is spoken in answer to an unnamed questioner who asks, "Lord, are they few that be saved?" The answer is, "Strive to enter in by the narrow door; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in and shall not be able" (R.V.). The words which follow tend slightly to suggest that the unsuccessful seekers here have been seeking to enter by the right door. And the last word *ἰσχύσσοντι* recalls *ἀγωνίζεσθε*, and seems to give this sense: Strive, because there will be a general failure of strength, and it will need all you have got. But whatever the spiritual sense may be, it is hardly conceivable that our Lord should exhort His followers to put out their strength in an endeavour in which many fail from want of strength. Such teaching would be depressing and unlike any which we know to have fallen from His lips. The other sense will be, "Strive to enter by the narrow door, because many will try to enter by other doors but will fail owing to want of strength," or simply "will not be able." If this is correct, there remain two questions: (a) What is the meaning of the narrow door? (b) Why are the future tenses employed?

It is, of course, possible that the words as handed down are defective and that it is not possible to recover the exact relation between the simile and the thing signified; and we may remark in passing that the two passages tell against the use of a common document on the part of Matthew and Luke. But be that as it may, it is best to fix the connotation of the adjective "narrow," so as to suit both passages if possible, and that may be done if we take it to mean "hard to find." "Straitened," in Matthew vii. 13, may point to the additional feature of a road hemmed in by obstacles, underwood, or rocks; but while this would add to the vividness of the picture, it would not prevent the main idea being "hard to find."

So the general interpretation of Luke xiii. 24 will be as follows: The question refers to fewness or the reverse of those who are in the way of salvation. The central idea conveyed by the words as they stand: "Those who will be eager to enter My kingdom will be numerous enough. But of these many will fail from insufficient strength. Do ye therefore strive to enter by the only door which is possible to such as you with limited strength; it is narrow and hard to find, and the attempt to

By way of summing up and showing the connexion of clauses we may paraphrase thus : Think of the end

enter by it, *i.e.* to keep faithfully to the road which leads to it, will involve a struggle." This can now be applied to the pilgrimage of the world : "There is a course of life determined by certain essential conditions ; when once these are ignored the way is lost. The keeping of these conditions is the difficulty, and involves effort. It is very easy to be careless about them while being sincerely anxious as to the salvation which is offered ; but the result is that the traveller aims at heaven by a way not prescribed, which is broad and easy to find and keep to, not hemmed in by conditions, but leading to destruction. The conditions are those which are insisted on throughout the New Testament—self-surrender to Christ, renunciation of the world, repentance, &c. These bring grace and strength sufficient for achievement, but through life there is a constant temptation to walk without surrender of self though with every wish to reach the goal, *i.e.* enter the palace, and if there are other doors they require strength which is not promised. The walking by the wrong road is the living easily, ignoring these conditions ; easily, because our inclinations are to a false independence, and we go accompanied by a crowd, since as soon as self-surrender ceases the securing of men's approbation becomes the dominant motive."

Thus the two passages emphasise different aspects of the journey of life. The verses in Matthew give as the key-note of the parable "few they be that find it." The Luke passage supplies the precious thought that strength for the pilgrimage is only to be expected on the prescribed road ; also the very important detail, that many who fail are yet anxious to succeed. In short, we have again a vivid warning of our Lord's against the wrong sort of effort to gain heaven—by a method described as easy and suitable to the common temperament of mankind. This description fits exactly to the almost universal tendency among all nations and peoples towards a false independence of God. We are sliding from the narrow to the broad way as soon as our religious life becomes divorced from the principles laid down by Christ. He taught that our pilgrimage towards salvation must be that of a corporate society, conditioned by repentance, faith, hope, and charity, but, above all, by surrender to Him and conformity to God's will.

In St. Luke "many will seek." This obviously points forward to a state of things not begun when the words were spoken. Something is forecasted as going to come about which will make it easy to desire salvation, and yet to go the wrong way to attain to it. The future tense can hardly mean less than this ; and such a description fits with the founding of the Christian Church, dating from which time the greatness of the hope held out to mankind has stirred ineffable longings ; but their fulfilment has been often thwarted by man's insane desire for independence.

of life to which your pilgrimage on earth is meant to bring you—the entry, as you hope, into eternal life itself. The reason why this is necessary is that there is a wrong way of travelling and a wrong entry, both leading to destruction, not to life; and unless you have clearly in your minds the end which you hope to gain, you will easily misconceive the meaning of your earthly pilgrimage, and live, as many do, the life which ends in destruction. Because the true end and aim of life is thoroughly understood by only a few, and so only a few are living by the right principle which would guide them thither. That principle I have been explaining to you all along; it is that your lives should be in every single respect the lives of those who realise that they are God's children, and that in His fatherly care of them they can trust entirely; and so their joy will be to do His will, with hearts and minds ever set towards Him. Thus the Christian life is like a journeying along a narrow path towards a narrow gate; it demands constant watchfulness, or you may stray from the right principle heedlessly, and find yourselves wandering in error while fully believing you are making for the goal of eternal life. The end of your journey is difficult to make sure of, and so also are the principles of conduct which will lead you thither. If either one or the other were easy, there would be some excuse for thoughtlessness; but, as it is, there is none. But be prepared for finding that it is of no use relying on human advice and the influence of prevailing fashion in this great matter. Such guidance as that depends on your doing as the majority do; but I tell you that you must travel on a road where there are only a few companions, and however much you naturally crave for companionship you must be prepared to do without it, finding always sufficient spiritual guidance in

your relation to God your Father. Very different from this is the pilgrimage of those whose aim is to satisfy the broad and easy demands of fashion and worldly opinion. Plainly, they will live a life in conformity with the large majority ; their end is easy to achieve, and the way to it they cannot miss, as they only have to drift as if they were floating down a broad stream ; but it is the law of the life which you have to learn that whatever that end may appear to be, it is in reality destruction.¹

¹ This paraphrase, which from its very awkwardness may bring out into clearer relief the nervous beauty of the original, is intended to show what lines of thought are suggested by one among several ways of reading the Greek original. The most important alternative would be to take the "gate" as meaning the entry on to the narrow way, instead of the entry into a palace or city (e.g. Sadler, "Comm. Matt."). Apart from the fact that the lessons which this interpretation would afford seem much less fruitful (which, of course, ought not to weigh in the question), I rely on the R.V. reading of Luke xiii. 24, *θύρας* not *πύλης*, as indicating, even more decisively than *πύλη*, the end of the journey, or some kind of portal through a wall. Moreover, it is more natural to think of a road as leading *to* than *from* a gate. For it may perhaps be assumed that even if Christ spoke the parable twice, varying the words, yet the same general picture was in His mind (cf. John x. 7, 18). If this assumption is disallowed, and we are thrown back on the alternative, it is very doubtful what meaning should be given to *πύλη*. Sadler (*in loc.*) takes it as meaning Baptism. But besides the incongruity with the general tone of the Sermon, why should Baptism be described as a *narrow gate*? It admitted three thousand in one day (Acts ii. 41), and, ever since the conversion of Constantine, has been, on the whole, the fashionable mode of entering on a Christian profession of life. No such particular interpretation is possible, and the utmost we could do would be to conceive of some decisive initial conversion of heart independent, apparently, of Baptism. But it is doubtful if our Lord would have laid down an injunction to His hearers to "be converted," as if it were an act which lay within their power. [At least, no support for such an idea can be gathered from the use of *ἐπιστρέψω*.] Possibly a vaguer sense may be intended : "The life to which ye are called is difficult to follow, and very different from any kind of worldliness." Such interpretation would be free from some difficulties, but, like other general paraphrases, would yield far less instruction than the definite rendering adopted here.

Other points in the Greek are suggested by the double *ὅτι*. Here the

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first is taken as = “because,” introducing the reason for the command *εἰσελθατε*. But the second *ὅτι* I have ignored as being a doubtful reading. If it is thought that this is an inconsistent course to adopt with a R.V. reading, then the conjunction may be taken (1) as co-ordinate with the first *ὅτι*, and giving a second reason for the command, or (2) as giving a reason for the clause introduced by the first *ὅτι*—a sub-subordinate. Neither seem very satisfactory, and the reading *τι* = how ! exclamatory, is certainly tempting.

XXVIII

THE PROPHETS IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

vii. 15-20

SOME light, though only of a negative kind, is thrown on the vexed question of the composition of the Gospels, by a comparison between this passage and Matt. xv. 14 and Luke vi. 43. There is a disposition in some quarters to assume that St. Luke's grouping of the sayings of Christ must be historically accurate, while that of St. Matthew is according to the writer's view of their connexion. Now in Luke vi. we find the saying about the tree and fruit dissociated from that about the blind guides. In Matt. xv. the latter parable is spoken in the most natural possible connexion, which has every appearance of being accurate; while, *per contra*, the Luke connexion is impossible to trace. Either, then, the Luke connexion is inaccurate, or the saying about the blind guides was repeated. If Matt. vii. 15 is accurate, the saying about the tree and fruit was also repeated. And if, indisposed to allow repetition, we are prepared to weigh impartially the claims of Matt. vii. 16, 17 against Luke vi. 43, there is little doubt that the connexion of the former is far more logical and natural; so that we seem in two ways to be warned against assuming that St. Luke's chronological accuracy is in every case more certain than that of the writer of the first Gospel. This estimate is, of course, made on the assumption

that we can reasonably expect a logical connexion in such writings as this. On this point, however, some doubt is admissible.

We have first to remark the unexpected character of the disguise attributed to the false prophets. Is not a prophet something of a leader? and if men are compared to *sheep*, a false leader, *i.e.* one who chose to assume the rôle without warrant, would naturally choose the garb of a *shepherd*. Clearly, therefore, there is an emphasis in this turn given to the parable. The false leaders find it expedient to don the garb of those they profess to lead. Again, the present tense, "come": does this denote the normal habit of those who are described as false prophets? or does it mean "who are even now coming to you"? If the former, then Christ is uttering a warning against a danger to which the Jews had frequently succumbed. On the other hand (1) the era of false Messiahs was at hand, though some had already appeared, and during the next forty years the sad tendency of the nation to follow blind guides was going to be manifested; and (2) apart from the future sense hinted at in "beware," the words "By their fruits ye shall know them" seem to restrict us to the times that were coming. The question then arises: Is the saying to be confined to the Jews, or is it of universal application to all who were going to profess and call themselves followers of Christ? As in other cases, the answer will depend on the view taken of the purpose of the great Sermon. The general instinct seems to us correct, to expand the sayings to the needs of the Christian Church of all time. Certainly we agree in recognising this character of nearly all the warnings and exhortations, and it is needless to withhold this recognition unless the laws of language and interpretation compel us to do so.

It is also possible that the expression "false prophets" points towards something less special and local than a false Messiah. It denotes properly one who without warrant lays claim to inspiration, and to being a mouthpiece of the divine Being, and hardly suits the military national character of a leader like Barchokebas. But the next words afford some guidance to the meaning of ver. 15. "By their fruits" (or the meaning of them) "ye shall know them well."

The fruit of a tree is the visible sensible expression of the tree's life, and is that by which we habitually judge of the quality of the life. One, therefore, who lays claim to inspiration professes to possess a power of life different from that of others. Our Lord says the quality of this claim will be certainly tested by the general outcome of the man's work and character, and He goes on to emphasise the impossibility of His followers being finally deceived. Just as it is impossible for us to rate the life of a thistle, as if in fruit-bearing power it resembled a fig-tree, so when the time comes for the results of a man's life to appear, be he teacher or leader or interpreter of God's words, it will be impossible for different estimates to be formed. The soundness or rottenness of the character will be decisively revealed by the operation of a law just as certain and as easy to test as that which reigns in the vegetable world distinguishing the fruit-bearing from the barren life. And if we are puzzled to know the purpose and meaning of the barren trees and barren human lives, our Teacher, in words of unmistakable vividness, points to the fact that the former, though failures, still serve a purpose of their planting : every one of such trees is used for firewood. So human lives which evidently fail of the object for which apparently they were created yet do not end

in useless extinction. It would be rash to press the details of an image so very briefly expressed and probably in a much condensed report; but we are reminded of the frequency with which in Christ's teaching the end of the unproductive human life is spoken of under the figure of fire—irresistibly suggesting a scorching, purifying, transfiguring process; and in this verse with the further idea hinted at of usefulness in spite of dry decay. And He closes with a *quasi*-triumphant recapitulation. "So you see, then, that by their fruits ye shall know them."

Such seems at first sight the connexion of ideas in this passage as it stands. Profoundly interesting topics are suggested by this handling of the subject, one of the most difficult and important of which is the ethical character of human judgment. Men are here encouraged to judge, whereas in vi. 1 they are forbidden to. Again, there is a remarkable difference in the contexts of the Matthew and Luke passages. In one, fruits are pointed to, to allay anxiety lest we should not be able to discern false prophets. In the other, the figure is used to condemn over-readiness to judge. The one gives confidence in judging; the other checks it. In both a tranquil patience as to our neighbour's claims and faults is enjoined, the fact being that in time the result will show itself unmistakably and according to an invariable law. As to the time when this will take place we have to learn some caution in inquiry. The answer given to the question, "Lord, when shall these things be?" seems to teach that curiosity as to the future is not to be encouraged, certainly not to the belittling of the present with all its eternal issues; and it is probable that in all the divinely inspired prophecies there is a sense in which the final fulfilment is anticipated, even

repeatedly, by the events of human history. But in this passage there is a striking emphasis laid on the future, "ye shall know them," in comparison with the present, "who come to you in sheep's clothing," as if the danger was present, but the enlightenment whereby it is to be met was foreseen as a gift; and we are reminded of the definite promise in St. John of the Comforter who "shall guide you into all truth." It is very easy to under-estimate most seriously the magnitude of the event in time which is spoken of as the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church. Can anything greater ever have happened than the beginning of the special indwelling of the Third Person of the Trinity in mankind? And the more we reflect on that sublime climax of all the high hopes of the human race, the less unwilling we shall be to find indications in Christ's teaching of the *preparatory* character of His work on earth, as if the divine event in the immediate future were in some sense ever present to His mind. We find, in short, that here, as often elsewhere, a state of life is foreshadowed which for some reason not stated is to be specially favourable to the manifestation of spurious goodness and greatness, and against this manifestation Christ gives the most solemn and impressive warnings, which are echoed by His followers; and though, when speaking later to His apostles, or to the leaders of religious opinion in the Temple, He becomes more definite, there is nothing surprising in His touching upon the subject repeatedly in this great early discourse where He is sketching the qualifications of membership in His kingdom. We may, therefore, take the main sense of this passage to be, that though the danger had always been to some extent real, the foundation of that kingdom was to be the signal for a special form of counterfeit goodness congenial to the self-

asserting instincts of men, viz., the appearance of would-be leaders of opinion, interpreters of God's messages, inspired teachers ; possibly men of thoroughly genuine conviction, and certainly plausible enough to be dangerous (else, why should the warning be given ?), but that along with their appearance on the scene a law would operate to strip off their disguise, so that the divinely enlightened vision of Christ's society would plainly perceive the true character of the claim by its outcome. If the character of the prophet were sound, it was certain that the work done and the message delivered by him would be so far sound and stable that there would be no mistaking its nature. If the future tense is taken not as pointing forward to the gift of the Holy Spirit, it can only mean that with patience and after a lapse of time the true estimate is certain to be formed. This is tempting ; but we must not forget that throughout the Sermon the hearers are addressed as those who presently were to be members of a corporation (v. 20, vi. 10). In this very passage, indeed always where men are compared to sheep, the picture called up is that of a flock. There is no animal which so irresistibly suggests gregariousness as a sheep, since a solitary one is almost certainly strayed from the flock and exhibits every sign of bewilderment and helplessness. A lost sheep is not a sheep which has lost the way towards a particular goal, a pasture or a fold, but one which has simply lost its fellows ; and though the parabolic uses of this animal are appropriate in other ways, notably for its dependence and instinct of following, that is no reason why we should ignore the emphasis laid on our life as Christians being that of a community. So Christ treats the problems of conduct in the light of social claims, that is to say, the claims of brother-

hood. And if here this aspect is present to Him, why should it be supposed that the transcendent fact of the Holy Spirit's dower is omitted ?

The figure of the false prophets being clad in sheep's clothing instead of shepherds' is very suggestive. The teachers assimilate themselves to the taught, take their standard, pretend in every way to be one of them, as gentle and inoffensive, while in their secret hearts they are bent on seizing gain for themselves to the destruction of the flock. Taking the Old and New Testaments together, we shall hardly find any warnings so terrible as those directed against sham guides, false teachers, self-constituted prophets, all of whom are actuated by motives of gain. And how great then must be the responsibility of those who are divinely called and ordained to the ministerial office in Christ's Church, especially in days when the world is insisting more loudly than ever on the need of clergy being "in touch" with the laity ! There is, of course, truth in this claim, but its urgency may well be prompted by a simple wish for easy and pleasant relations. People prefer to have clergy about them, and are ready to make much of them if only they will adopt conventional standards and not be too strict nor too obviously lax. And, on this side, the priests are under a constant temptation to make gain out of this very conformity to a required standard, though it can hardly escape their knowledge that herein lies the *wolfish* character, ravening for gain even at the cost of the lives and souls of their flock—the gain either of good position or reputation, or friendly relations or neighbourliness ; while, as there is no tone of the Cross in their message, no severity in their lives, no fruit of painful study or mortification of self, "the hungry sheep look up and are not fed." And the time will come when the barrenness

of such a life will be manifested too clearly to be mistaken; and then by another law, quite as certain in its operation, comes the awful and mysterious sequel of the drama of a human soul: the tree that beareth not good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire.

XXIX

NOT EVERY ONE THAT SAITH UNTO ME, LORD, LORD

vii. 21

ONE of the perplexing facts in Christian life is that there are many natures to which the moral ideal exhibited by Christ is supremely attractive, and by them the allegiance demanded to conscience and duty is freely given ; and yet they are the very natures to which the personal element in religion is uncongenial. We all know people whose deepest emotions are stirred by questions of right and wrong, and whose rectitude is entirely admirable, but who always find prayer an effort and are unable to say that their spirits ever glow with a feeling of personal union with God. For these it is sometimes thought that this text supplies consolation. The words seem at first sight to exalt rectitude of conduct above an emotional and easily uttered piety, and, taken in that sense, they cannot fail of being acceptable to an age which flatters itself that it is practical, and recognises that “ religiosity ” is an affair of temperament.

This interpretation of the words, however, is astonishingly shallow and misleading. It ignores the heart of each clause of the verse. And the simplest way to arrive at some idea of the depth of meaning contained in the words is to examine first the sense of the title

here given, "Lord, Lord," then that of the phrase "doeth the will of My Father."¹

The title "Lord" is a rendering of three Hebrew words of different degrees of grandeur. When it translates the highest of the three it is printed in both of our versions as "LORD"; when it denotes the second it becomes "Lord"; when it is merely a respectful title, the capital is dropped and the word stands as "lord." Thus here the second of the appellations is intended. So we have to ask what is meant by those who give (or gave then when the words "our Lord" were spoken) this title to Christ, and we are at once brought to the idea of a positive outspoken recognition of His divine claims. And such confession of His name was then, as always, but especially then, a proof of great moral courage and of insight into the divine character. There were many powerful influences at work to bewilder the minds of the Jews; just as in the present day a genuine heartfelt belief in Christ as our Lord has to contend against innumerable subtle solvents, distractions of modern life, extravagant claims of science, and the imperious demands of a host of worldly interests. At no period of the Church's life has such a confession been easy; and there is nothing whatever to indicate that Christ was thinking of a sham belief or an insincere profession. So we have no right to restrict this solemn warning to the ordinary hypocrites who abound everywhere. Why should Christ have thought it worth while to warn mankind against that which is universally held to be odious? We may be sure that these tremendous sayings were intended to expose some sort of religion which, though hollow, was to be imposing and in many respects admirable; and the first indication of the

¹ *Vide* Hastings' "Bible Dictionary": Article, "Lord."

meaning of the words fully bears out this surmise. We may paraphrase the warning clause, "Not every one that recognises My Messiahship or even My divinity, not even if he has had to face obloquy and loss of happiness, or to lay down his life for his belief, will enter into the Kingdom which I am here to found."

The repetition of the word "Lord" need not mean the insincerity of mere lip-service. It would equally well describe real emotional fervour: the paying of homage to Christ as Lord with true ardour and enthusiasm. All that is included in what we call the religion of the heart as well as the bravest orthodoxy and intellectual discernment of His claims seems to be indicated by the phrase, with perhaps more emphasis laid on warmth of the feeling than on depth of thought. The verse becomes more instructive the more of what is admirable we see in the phrase. Christ says: "It is possible to be what you would all take to be the highest type of a religious man, and yet fail in the one thing needful." We must remark on the astonishing character of the claim here advanced. Jesus at the time of the delivery of the Sermon, as far as we know, was not yet recognised by the people of Galilee as Messiah; but here he speaks of warm-hearted allegiance to Himself and open confession of His greatness as the marks of a religious spirit which, though it needed something to supplement it, was sure to captivate mankind; otherwise the warning would not have been needed. It was as if He had said, "I come to found a Kingdom. But the most ardent allegiance and worship of Myself is not, as you would have expected, all that is needed for true membership." The terms in which this admirable but possibly hollow religion is described are most striking. How much simpler the verse would have been if the description concerned only con-

temporary Jewish orthodoxy and strictness. But the words now are full of the future. They anticipate a state of things when loyalty to Christ shall have been accepted by men as essential—so much so that He found it necessary to point out that however excellent a thing this loyalty was, there was only one thing, and that not necessarily the same, which could be called really indispensable to true membership. It is difficult to imagine any saying which could show a more piercing insight into the situation.

It is important, however, to note that though our Lord here emphasises afresh the tremendous truth of the deceptiveness of the religious life, there is no crude classification or disregard of the complexities of human character. The cautious phrase “not every one” implies quite clearly that there is no necessary incompatibility between the loyalty to Himself and the one thing needful which is afterwards stated; only that it is possible for the former to be divorced from the latter. We are not even told that this is easy; but it is possible, and therefore a warning was necessary.

Our interest now becomes awakened to see what is the one essential which must take precedence of this enthusiastic devotion to Christ and recognition of His highest claims. What type of character is to be secure of entry into the “Kingdom of the heavens”? But before considering this we may modernise the first expression, and think what it specifies among men’s characters as we know them to-day.

At the time the words were spoken they denoted a feeling towards Christ which betokened a power of resisting fashion and discerning the meaning of a great transition, the change from the old to the new Dispensation; the gift of adaptability and understanding of novelty, shown in the lofty achievement

of welcoming the Saviour when the great mass of public opinion was against Him. Such gifts are nowadays shown by some who in the highest regions of human life have risen superior to custom and convention ; whose religion is elastic and first-hand, and perhaps distinguished by courage, ardour, and power of leadership. Only choice spirits could be reckoned among the best of these. They are among those without whom great progressive movements in the history of thought and social development would have been impossible. Adaptability to new conditions, new minds, new ideas is a singularly useful gift ; when it shows itself in religious matters by loyalty to the highest, and by intrepid devotion, it becomes rare and wonderful ; when it rises to the height reached by a John the Baptist or a Paul, it becomes sublime ; and yet Christ tells us that there is one thing the want of which would have excluded all saints so endowed from the Kingdom He came on earth to found.

“But he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” So is described the type of man to whom the Kingdom is not barred, no matter what defects in other departments of character he may have. The first observation to be made on the words is that they point towards a personal relation with God. If among human beings A wishes to do the will of B, he must first ascertain what it is. In certain cases this can be done by reading written statements, but only to a strictly limited degree ; that is, in so far as a certain set of outward actions can be prescribed. Again, and to a similarly limited degree, the will of B can be determined through an intermediary reporting to A. But suppose the wishes of B refer not only to what A is to do, but what he is to be, it is obvious that these wishes can be safely determined only by personal intercourse, maintained so as to lead to mutual know-

ledge. And so it is between us and God. To act out the will of God is possible only on one of two conditions. Either man is a machine impelled from outside and not responsible for his actions, or he is a free agent in relation to a living Being whose mind he must learn before he can live in conformity with it. Already, then, we are far removed from the position which was suggested by a first superficial reading of these words. "To do the will of God" would be a strange expression for a mechanical performance of routine duty, though in some cases it may conceivably *in appearance only* come to mean something like this. The words are only appropriate to the description of a life which outwardly exhibits an inward conformity with the divine Mind ; and that conformity, as far as we know, is only the result of personal intercourse leading to intimacy, coupled, of course, with willingness of self-surrender on the part of the human being.

It is worth while to notice the tone in which the doing of God's will is spoken of elsewhere by our Lord—Mark iii. 35. He who so lives is reckoned by Christ as if he were a blood relation : "The same is my brother and sister and mother." (Cf. the remarkable variety of expression in Matt. xviii. 14.) In Matt. xxi. 31 it is spoken of as the test of virtue, determining which of two men was the better. The warning conveyed in Luke xii. 47 is tremendously stern. The knowledge of the divine will, if unaccompanied by action in life with a view to the Judgment, will entail the punishment of "many stripes" (John iv. 34), but the faithful performance of the will gives sustenance to the doer and independence of material goods. Even so (v. 30) the searching after God's will gives the faculty of unerring judgment. (Cf. vi. 38, 39; vii. 17; ix. 31.)

But the striking expression itself would be of little

use to us had it not been completely illuminated by the conduct of Christ Himself. He revealed to us in all its perfection the life of a *θεοδιδακτος*, of one "taught of God," and in Him we see the living variety of an inwardly renewed life applied to every circumstance of difficulty, danger, joy, sorrow, and contravention of worldly principles, and perpetually replenished by prayer. Men naturally gravitate towards formulated inelastic directions for ordinary conduct, under the delusion that they may be saved the trouble of thinking. This is man's natural preference for what is dead to that which being really full of life makes a demand on his energies; and it was exhibited in precisely this form by the Judaisers in the early Christian church. Their zeal for the Mosaic law and tradition of the elders was largely the desire of the mentally and spiritually slothful; the craving for that kind of guidance which promises exemption from the necessity of self-conquest and gradually increasing closeness of intercourse with the invisible God. Men, if they are spared this, are willing to take almost any amount of trouble of an unspiritual kind. As St. Paul sorrowfully admits about his countrymen, they had zeal, not *κατὰ γνῶστιν*; not the sort of zeal quickened, sustained, and informed by the knowledge of a personal God.

Once more: the idea of God's will is enriched by the paraphrase "of My Father which is in the heavens"—words which add the idea of the source of our life, inspiration; being all that is contained in the notion of a Fatherhood, just and loving, also spiritual, and belonging to a higher order of being. The thought of intercourse with such an One seems to suggest that of knowledge, which plays so important a part in the following verses.

In short, we seem to find in these most solemn

words a startling and searching caution illustrating the text, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Impressive though a life may be which is lived in outspoken ardent loyalty to Christ, distinguished by courage of conviction and power to withstand a flood of worldly influences, yet it is possible that such a life may after all be selfish. To some natures religion is an affair of inclination, and as such has to be braced and purified by discipline ; and if selfish it may become wilful ; and if wilful it acts contrary to God's will, and so becomes an instrument in the service of mammon ; or, like the sweet endowment of a taste for music, simply a means of self-gratification. It is, alas, possible for selfishness to don the garb of worship. And while there is no belief which ought to inspire so much self-devotion as the belief in the Incarnation, there are some who sincerely hold the belief but lack the renewing power of intercourse with God which comes of waiting on His will, because though they believe they do not act out their belief in prayer. People must have thought eighteen centuries ago that the confession, "Lord, Lord," could not be made from interested motives, and so we may think to-day—yet it can.

The words indeed drive us back relentlessly on the paramount necessity of the foundations of the character being sound—a hopeless message to mankind, unless some prospect be foreshadowed of the gift of inward renewal. Again, the Sermon points forward to Pentecost. For the holding out of a false hope or the pressing of demands which are far too lofty to be satisfied, and which yet stir our noblest yearnings, would be not only a disappointing of mankind by Him who came to "seek and to save that which is being lost," but cruelty. And we cannot conceive of cruelty on the part of One who loved mankind so well.

XXX

“MANY WILL SAY TO ME IN THAT DAY”

vii. 22, 23

AT first hearing these stately words contain a message of terrific import with regard to the claim made upon the followers of Christ, and again they assert, somewhat suddenly, the majesty of the Speaker, and elevate the humble teacher in Galilee to the position of supreme Judge of mankind. Sometimes those who are disposed to take what may be called the anti-dogmatic view of the person of Christ, and rely vaguely on the supposed simplicity of the Sermon on the Mount, seem to ignore the question raised by these verses. Either the words were spoken early, as here recorded, or later, and recorded out of chronological order, or not spoken at all. In the present condition of our knowledge of the structure of the Synoptic Gospels it is vastly easier to assume one of these theories than to prove it; indeed, not unfrequently one of them is assumed on wholly subjective grounds, and the verses treated as of greater or less importance accordingly. We will proceed to consider first the questions suggested by the words themselves.

Christ draws a picture here of Himself uttering at some future time a verdict on many claimants to His favour, who can point to a series of brilliant and beneficial achievements performed, as is thrice as-

serted, in or by His name. And the reason why the claim fails utterly is that He will recall the decisive fact that He never knew them ; and in recalling this He will banish them from His presence, stigmatising them as workers of "iniquity," or, more accurately, according to Matthew, "lawlessness"; Luke, "unrighteousness." In Luke the Psalm (vi. 9) is differently quoted, and the context of the saying is so different that it is advisable at present to leave out of account the semi-parallel in considering the Matthew text.

What is meant by Christ knowing, or not knowing, one of His professed followers ? And is the knowledge thus specified to be conceived of as mutual ; that is, would the indictment be the same as "I tell you ye never knew Me," which to a modern reader would give a far simpler sense ?

Whichever of these may be the meaning, it is clear that, broadly speaking, the fatal defect here spoken of is the absence of a certain personal relation to Christ. In the endeavour to conceive more precisely of this relation, we must notice, first, that it is spoken of as of supreme and decisive importance in the face of claims which are stated with all possible emphasis. What is set aside as of secondary importance and not indispensable to salvation is not simply brilliant and successful endeavour in the highest department of human service, but achievement attained to by workers in His name, apparently the description of prolonged and utterly loyal fidelity to the Lord.

Again, the word "lawlessness" suggests that, whatever be the defect of this service so described, its issue is that it is in a direction or plane away from the true law of man's being. Thus man, if he is to fulfil the highest possibilities of his nature, must be in a certain personal relation to Christ, the absence of which can

be compensated for by nothing, not even by the most dazzling success in the endeavour to restore and uplift human life, in the name of Christ, by inspired utterance, or by victory over evil spirits, or by triumphant control of matter by spiritual power. And the sentence finally passed on a life so lived is that it will not be rewarded by permission to dwell with the Lord ; it must continue in banishment from Him, the reason being that He never came to get knowledge of such applicants. We are still in much doubt as to the meaning of these last words.

Scholars have clearly ascertained the difference between the two words for "know," one of which is used in this text, the other from the semi-parallel in Luke (xiii. 27), "I know not whence ye are." Our word is shown to mean, "To get to know, as one learns another's character by sympathy through experience." Thus Christ is described by St. Paul as one "who knew no sin," never had personal experience of it ; but in Luke xiii. the meaning simply is, "I am not conscious whence ye are ; I do not know."¹ So perhaps we may paraphrase the Matthew text, "Depart from Me ; I never saw in you that which was like My own character ; the rest lay outside My cognisance." In short, may we not conclude that what Christ sees but does not "know" in the lives of those who will come before Him at the last day must be simply sin. While on earth He never got to understand sin, says St. Paul, though constantly brought into violent contact with it ; it never got root in His being, but throughout it remained true that the "Prince of this world . . . hath nothing in Me" (John xvi.). Now, obviously the knowledge a sinful man has of that which we call sin is deeper and more

¹ Note on *γιγνώσκω* and *οἶδα* by Evans on 1 Cor. xiii. ; viii. 1. Westcott on John ii. 24. Addit. note, p. 45.

intimate than that possessed by Christ, the sinless One, who, as we may infer, anyhow from St. Paul, was limited in respect of this kind of knowledge, just as we may conceive of God as limited in respect of His action by the existence of free-will among some of His creatures. The sentence begins to be intelligible to us if we take it as indicating that in these lives there will have been so little that is Christ-like and so much that is "sin"—a missing of the mark, a deflection, in spite of all appearances, from the true development of man's being—that it will be impossible for Him to say that He ever thoroughly understood the character. What He will have looked on while the life was being lived is something which He never knew by experience.

Thus the verdict in becoming more intelligible becomes also more terrific to us in so far as it relates to ourselves and the possible issue of our own lives, and more startling in the supreme might and paramountcy of claim asserted by Christ for Himself.

But any honest learner must desire to know more of the kind of characters spoken of, and to seek out any possible test whereby we may distinguish broadly those whom Christ knows from the "many" whom He knows not. And again we are led to think if there is any way of conceiving at all clearly why some are spoken of as known by Him rather than as themselves knowing Him.

Interpreters will differ in their answers to the first question. But we are safe in recurring to the text and stating the question thus: Granting that the appearance of some lives is all that could well be imagined in respect of dazzling success in the noblest forms of human endeavour, what is wanting, or what may be wanting in spite of all? One answer clearly is, the humility of a personal service. In the putting

forth of his utmost energies for the amelioration of his fellow-creatures, a human being may rely on the Divine name to give force to his appeal and to his undertakings, and all the time feel rightly sure that he is working "in the name" or "by the name" of Christ. And yet the motive may be ambition and the outcome self-glorification ; and if that is so the issue will be a character so totally unChrist-like that we should be no longer bewildered at being told that He never got to understand it with the understanding of sympathy and progressive intimacy corroborated by experience. Christ does not say here that the plea "in My name" is altogether true ; the words imply that the speaker will think them true, and so there is no need to inquire how far the expression can truly be applied to any work which in motive is alien from the Christian spirit. Thus it is possible for the brilliant achievements to be compatible with a character so selfish and ambitious that the conscience may have lost all discernment as to motive, and be ready to plead in all sincerity that the work has been in loyal service when it has in reality been done wholly "apart from Christ" (John xv. 5).

Other ways of describing the wrong kind of spirit in which work is undertaken might be suggested. It would be consonant to the teaching of the New Testament to put in the very forefront of the characteristics demanded of the Christian worker, that he should be ever convinced that all that he has he has received (1 Cor. iv. 7). Where this conviction holds, ambition is impossible, unless ambition is conceived of as entirely unselfish ; but if it is, it should be called by another name. As soon as the conviction dies or is never planted, then the very brilliancy of successful work for Christ is sure to foster the unChrist-like temper of self-congratulation.

“And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you.” We have noted certain facts which help us to understand the negative phrase expressing the unlikeness to our Lord in certain characters; but the converse remains to be explained. In Gal. iv. 9 St. Paul hints at the existence of human beings who may be spoken of as knowing God in an incomplete way, but as being known completely by Him. Now if the inference from Matt. vii. 23 is sound, viz., that when our Lord describes Himself as failing to know a character, it is because He cannot know what is thoroughly alien to Himself, we seem to be right in further inferring that where God is spoken of as knowing men it is because in spite perhaps of appearances, the character is fundamentally Christ-like; the loyalty is to God, or at least to goodness, and not to self. And this knowledge of God being spoken of as complete indicates that the personal relation is complete *ex parte Dei*, but that is not the same as saying that it is necessarily complete *ex parte hominis* at the same time. In other words, we have a hint given us that there may be many lofty-souled human beings unselfish to the core and growing in steadfast devotion to goodness, pure and upright and strong, who yet may not be conscious in any vivid way of a *personal* relation to Christ. Devotees of different religious systems have at times tried to make out that such a religious attitude as this is wholly wrong, and probably many of us are quite aware of the difficulty of proving from Scripture that our instincts in regard to such people are not in error; that we are right in believing them to be acceptable to God, known by Him and growing in His grace, though perhaps they themselves know it not. A great deal of our New Testament language, and perhaps all of our Prayer Book phraseology, presupposes in the reader a sense

of the personal relation with the Divine. But we can hardly suppose that such a sense is a necessary condition of salvation. If we listen to St. Paul in another great passage, we shall have a light cast on the question from his own conviction: "Then shall I know, even as also I am known." These familiar words from 1 Cor. xiii. would be more accurately rendered, "Then shall I fully know, even as also I have been fully known." The knowledge of God possessed by the believer is clearly conceived of as incomplete now but going to be completed hereafter. And if in all cases it is incomplete now, we have no reason to be surprised that in very many cases it has not advanced beyond the embryonic stage: there must be every variety of degree of intimacy. And when we consider the mysterious fact that the growth of the religious sense (as distinct from the moral) is, like the growth of all other faculties, dependent on the care and training due from elders and parents, but lamentably often withheld, we shall be ready to expect that very often the sense of growth in this respect is imperceptible, and so we are confronted by the puzzling fact of great moral beauty of character co-existing with apparently little interest in the devotional side of religious life; because while principle is the mainstay of such lives, it is not always referred to a Person. And the pity of it is that the energy of religious zealots of all classes is liable to exert itself in extracting from such people professions of warm feeling and spiritual fervour, which, if made, could not be genuine. This endeavour results, as might have been expected, in stirring up the inclination to take up an attitude of antagonism to any definition of faith, and is one, though perhaps not the chief, of the causes why many of the educated laity dislike creeds. Preachers to mixed

congregations are faced by an almost insoluble problem in this respect. Not only do people go to church whose interest in all abstract discussion, moral, religious or philosophical, is strangely languid, but some of the most useful workers in the parish are mentally so constituted that appeals which are distinctly religious, as apart from being only moral, are made in their case to faculties which have been left dormant, and apparently will remain so till the end of life; while such appeals are urgently demanded by the third class, who are naturally well represented, of those to whom a sense of the divine life within them is strong—anyhow, strong enough to be perceptibly growing, and to induce a feeling that any exhortation which passes it by is powerless to move or to uplift, and leaves behind a sense of nourishment withheld. Our Lord surmounted a similar difficulty in Palestine by the use of parables.

Thus we may sum up the central idea of these verses as follows: There is a kind of homage paid to Christ which is vehement in expression and rich in profession of loyalty to His name; but, owing to the subtlety of the sin of selfish ambition, it is easy to be completely deceived as to the genuineness of this homage and of the loyalty which it apparently expresses, and so to invest a whole life of self-glorification with a halo of veneration for Christ. And this is true even if the life inspired by a selfish aim has been rich in splendid achievements on behalf of suffering humanity, and wrought always in the full profession of allegiance to our divine Master. It would be possible so to work with results ensuring the advance in happiness and even in goodness of whole generations of men, and with every appearance of sure and outspoken belief in the power of the Christian profession, and in singleness of aim of a life devoted to

Christ, and yet to be so utterly estranged from Him in spirit that in the end His verdict will be that He never found anything whatever in such a character with which He could sympathise, or which He understood as being really like Himself ; and so the answer to the proud claim of triumphantly successful service is that the work throughout has been a working of lawlessness, in a direction contrary to the true development of a man's higher nature. It has been throughout apart from Christ, and so finally the severance, which has been completely veiled by the lustre of brilliant achievement, has to be manifested to all. "Depart from Me, ye workers of lawlessness."

XXXI

THE HOUSE ON THE SAND

vii. 24-27

THE extraordinary vividness of this parable, and especially that part of it which pictures the collapse of the house built on the sand, has caused many expositors to overlook the fact that the comparison is not between the hearer of Christ's words and the unstable house, but between the former and the man who builds the latter. A great deal of edifying writing has been spent on the hasty assumption that the words, "foolish man who built his house," mean nothing in particular. But in both reports we find this quite unwarranted. In St. Luke's report the emphasis is more distinctly on the builder than in St. Matthew's: "I will show you to whom he is like." Any scrupulous investigation into the meaning of the verses will begin with the exact comparison given us; and though the lessons to be drawn from it seem at first to be somewhat restricted in scope, an attentive consideration of the words will yield abundance of matter for reflection.

"He that heareth these words of Mine and doeth them"—Matt. "Every one that cometh unto Me, and heareth My words, and doeth them"¹—Luke

¹ This use of *ἐρχόμενος* appears to be one of the redundancies noticed by Dalman ("The Words of Jesus," p. 26) as a Hebraism and also a Jewish

vi. 47. Hearing and doing would be a very simple expression if the words applied to definite commands. But (1) we have seen that it is a very poor conception of the great Sermon to look on it as synonymous with a set of commands for ordinary conduct. Rather it is true to say that the definite commands are couched in paradoxical language in order that they may not be literally performed ; (2) It is not certain that the expression, "these words of Mine," or "My words," refers to the Sermon only. Whatever attitude of mind and will our Lord is enjoining with regard to these chapters surely is the right attitude with regard to all His sayings, even such as the discourses in St. John's Gospel. If there can be a hearing and a doing of such a saying as that in vi. 23, "If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness," it is then quite reasonable to bring all of the teaching under the same category ; that is, to recognise that it makes a claim on us and on our conduct, though often presented in the form of a principle, not of a precept.² Hence we may conclude that Christ means something of this kind ; that there is such a thing as listening with satisfaction to the exposition of the principles of the divine ordering of the world, or to the setting forth of the mysteries of the Godhead as well as to exhortations to moral effort, without allowing the words to influence the life, and that the normal way in which life is influenced is by the heart being touched and the thoughts being quickened. Our lives are governed by ideas ; and Christ's warning is best attended to by those who allow His uttered thoughts to sink quietly into their minds, and there

Aramaism. Therefore, though he does not quote this passage, I have forborne to extract any special meaning from this phrase in St. Luke's report.

² Other passages in these three chapters of the same sort are v. 3, *seqq.* ; vi. 24, 28; vii. 11, 16, 18 *seqq.* ; 21 *seqq.*

become germinating ideas which, of course, must influence outward conduct as time goes on, and which become stronger the more they are translated into outward conduct.

On the other hand, the expression "heareth and doeth not" reminds us of a remarkable characteristic of mankind. It is not very strange that people should refuse to translate ideas, which lead to moral effort, into action, but it is strange that they should find satisfaction in listening to the exposition of those very ideas the importance of which consists in their bearing on life and conduct; and which, nevertheless, they have not the faintest intention of carrying out into practice. And still stranger is it when, as in the case of Herod Antipas and St. John the Baptist, the teaching which is sought after consists in terrible denunciation of the listener's life and practice. And if there is some weird instinct in the human heart which allows of this, there is no wonder that the exquisite beauty of our Lord's teaching should be attractive even to those who from the first were utterly unable or unwilling to rise to the moral effort enjoined upon them, or even to the intellectual effort demanded by this setting forth of God's dealings with mankind. But the solemn words we are considering point to yet another class of listener. There must have been many among the multitudes in Galilee, as there are in our churches to-day, who could not be said to be unable or unwilling to translate the teaching into practical life, but rather received the word with gladness, and with the fullest intention of keeping it, only fell victims again and again to the law of reaction: "when the glow of early thought declines in feeling's dull decay." And to this class of men Christ addresses this particularly solemn warning, on the ground that there is no failure of religious and moral

life more pitiable and more mischievous than that of the religious lives which come to nothing ; not only the Pharisaic life which is selfish, but, as here, the life full of high and holy resolutions constantly renewed by fresh attention to the divine precepts, but constantly lapsing back into effete ineffectiveness and spiritless misgiving ; the result probably of the very warmth of the emotional glow into which the heart is repeatedly transported at the hearing of the well-known divine commands.

But in saying there is no failure more pitiable, we must not forget that there are more than two classes to be considered. Something is said about the hearers who are also doers, something also about the hearers who are not also doers ; but about those who are neither hearers nor doers, not a word. We are reminded of the solemn and impressive characteristic of Christ's delineation of the moral and spiritual condition of men, that when we should expect some notice of the class which to us is the most puzzling of all—the class of deliberately hostile, the minds utterly impervious to any form of Christian truth, the stony-hearted lovers of evil—He passes them over without a word. General Gordon said that there must have been many things which Christ saw on earth, and was silent. His treatment of the Sadducees as compared with the Pharisees is an illustration ; so little is said, and that little so free from denunciation. And again we compare the words spoken to the penitent robber with the absolute silence observed towards his companion. Now and again, of course, there comes a saying of terrific import, but too obscure to allow of any clear-cut doctrine to be reared upon it in regard to the destiny of the wicked, though unquestionably all such words should be kept in our minds as a soul-stirring corrective of levity, mental indolence, and

easy theories. But, on the whole, the silence is perhaps more awe-inspiring still, and indicates, as only silence can, mastery of the situation, and grasp of hidden conditions of the great problems of life and destiny. We have, in short, in this passage a parallel to the omission in the parable of the Sower, where nothing is said about the hearts of those who refuse to allow the seed to fall on them at all, indicating that the Saviour evidently thought it necessary to devote His most vivid warnings, not to the obdurately hostile, but to those who imagine they belong to Him.

So much for the idea of hearing and doing. We now have to examine the terms of the comparison, and we recur to the fact noticed at first that the two classes among the listeners to Christ are compared, not to a house well or wrongly built, but to the builders. Therefore the first question which ought to be faced at this point should run as follows : Now that we have determined to some degree the kind of character belonging to the doers and the non-doers among these listeners, what are the characteristics of the wise and foolish builders to whom they are respectively compared ? We have no right at present to say that the doer of Christ's teaching is a stable man, since he is not compared to the house on the rock. But we may say that he is a man willing to take trouble and to look forward. If we contrast the wise with the foolish builder, we can call up a picture of two men, one of whom is anxious to reach a definite visible result speedily and with the least possible expenditure of time, money, and trouble. The other, less anxious about the ease and rapidity with which the result can be accomplished, realises that the main object of the work he has undertaken is that it shall endure ; and, regardless of the fact that with far less expenditure of resources he might achieve

something which would present quite as imposing an appearance, and under favourable conditions prove no less useful for the object in view, he spares no effort which could ensure that his work should issue in something stable, no matter how serious the stress to which it will be exposed. He gives himself trouble, which for a long time seems quite fruitless, digging and piling bricks, and compacting laborious foundations below the surface of the ground. And all this he knows to be worth while, simply because in the future there is one thing certain—storms will come, with floods and rain; and to provide against them means prolonged and unpretentious toil, which to builders of different characters will seem superfluous, a throwing away of time, money, and trouble.

The character of the foolish builder, on the other hand, is indicated, first, by his refusal to take trouble; but this clearly depends on his incapacity to realise his future, though there is nothing in it which can be called mysterious or even uncertain. He is not like an ancient king who hesitates as to the meaning of an oracle, or, like one of the Trojan princes, divinely debarred from understanding the drift of Cassandra's prophecies. That in the future, against which it behoves him to take precautions, to plan and to toil, is simply a matter of ordinary observation and frequent occurrence. Many travellers have witnessed the phenomenon of the storm and the flood; hence we may conclude that the builder in question *knew* what the future would bring, but could not realise it. He was unable to bring it into his present with sufficient vividness to make it overcome his inclination to take things easily, to choose short cuts, and make a fair show for a time with labour which has cost as little as possible. But we must carefully distinguish this, the *fruit* of his character, from the character itself,

which has as its root defect this common proof of childishness, a feeble power of forecast, and a slavery to the inclinations of the moment. And the issue is conduct of almost unspeakable folly. It is not only that he makes inevitable the destruction of property and the waste of much time, money, and trouble, but the building which is thus doomed is the one in which he lives, so that with his property his own life is destroyed. It is difficult to imagine a more vivid picture of the madness of allowing the present to dominate the future.

It may be objected that, when we come to the region of motive and begin to apply the parable, men who are incapable of realising the future in any spiritual sense, *i.e.* the next world, yet are often found willing to take all possible trouble for this life, and to work for mankind, their country, or their school or their district, with thoroughness and success. True, but we should note that this may be, and often is, the outcome of a desire for fame, and this desire is only another form of subordinating the future to the present. The more any one's work for others is deep and patient and unpretentious, the more the worker has been influenced by his realisation of the future, while it is doubtful if there is such a thing as ambition, which is not a present need. Thus as much as possible of the foolish builder's work is above ground and visible, while the really valuable part of the wise builder's work is out of sight, and makes no show nor claim to notice of any kind.

The Saviour's searching insight is shown in His comparison of this kind of character to that of the listeners whom He addressed, but who had no care for the thorough application to their own lives of the teaching which they had heard. Religion is so intimately bound up with the best hopes and desires of

the human heart that it is for a large majority of people quite easy to be interested in it, even if the interest involves some expenditure of time, money, and trouble. To indulge this kind of interest gives the impression of making things safe, and of providing against the casualties of the future, which every one agrees to be imminent, just as one motive of the foolish builder was to secure for himself a protection against the time to come. But things are not thus made safe ; the indulging of interest in religion may be a mere gratification of a present inclination, a childish playing with something precious. It is quite possible to feel this gratification, even when the appeal to which we listen is addressed straight to the conscience, and when, if it means anything at all, it is charged with reproach and conviction of sin ; for, strange to say, the exercise of the faculty of what we call conscience is like exercise of any other faculty, if not overdone—it is accompanied by a sense of pleasure of which we are conscious, even when this very activity of our being issues in self-condemnation. In some natures the working of conscience is pleasurable when it is directed towards judgment on other people's lives ; but not unfrequently an individual finds it quite worth while to turn its solemn searchlight full on his own life rather than not use it at all. Indeed, the pleasure would be confessed to be more inward and subtle ; and it reminds him, too, of the exclusive possession of a certain knowledge, which seems at the time to be complete and far more thorough than that possessed by any one else of the same subject, the knowledge of his own complex character ; so that with all the self-censure which is involved, this stimulating of the divine faculty ministers insidiously to self-esteem.

In the main, however, the comparison between the two individuals rests on the fact that as the foolish

builder, partly to gratify his inclination, partly to do as others do, partly again, in the hope of making things safe, childishly¹ refuses to realise the future, and deals with the house which is to shelter his life from the whirlwind as he would deal with a toy, so there are many who, in the attention they pay to religion, are prone to put on one side the paramountcy of its claim on the thoughts and actions of daily life, refusing to see that, from the fact of trials and judgment to come, such a claim cannot be resisted without a renouncing of all reason and an affronting of adult man's higher faculties, and that in this case, as in the other, the peril which has been trifled with is terrific, and the ignoring of it issues in a complete and piteous ruin—the ruin not of a fair-seeming fabric made with hands and by man's device, but of a spiritual being made in the image of the Most High.

There is a practical corollary to be drawn from these solemn and awakening words which conclude the great Sermon. All who are concerned in furthering the work of the Church, the spreading of the knowledge of Christ's kingdom, would do well to reflect on the common tendency to deplore the widespread want of interest in religion. It is a phenomenon which many believe to be peculiar to this age, and it is an evil which is apparently increasing. We feel that it is a symptom of some dark and mysterious violation of the scheme of God's creation, a kind of stealing spiritual torpor to be resisted at all hazards and by every variety of device. That is our instinctive feeling, but if we wish to be guided by our Lord's teaching we shall strive towards a truer perspective in our view of life's problems. Instead of wringing

¹ It is worth noticing that the tendency to childish trifling in a matter of the utmost seriousness manifested itself among the Jews, especially in relation to the Baptist. Cf. Luke vii. 32.

our hands over the non-churchgoer we shall give far more consideration than we do to the regular attendant, whether clerical or lay. Beyond all question the emphasis in Christ's most impressive warnings is directed not to the stony-hearted or the callous, but to the responsive, the interested, the sympathetic votary of religion. And if the efforts of Christian ministers could be powerful enough to cleanse the Church from all hearing without doing, then we may well believe that the hardest hearts would be touched and the most sluggish natures quickened first into wonder, then into shame, then into adoration and praise. But wholly apart from all question of results, the proportionate distribution of Christ's preaching to the two classes, the open antagonists, and the self-deceiving adherents, should give us food for the deepest meditation and quiet our hearts with the sober influence of humility and fear.

XXXII

COROLLARY ON THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN

THE starting point of these studies was the spontaneous unstinted admiration professed far and wide for the Sermon on the Mount; and on the assumption that whether consciously or not this admiration must depend on the main idea of the Sermon, there followed an inquiry as to what the main idea is; and it was found to be the Fatherhood of God, taught by reference to certain principles of ordinary life and questions of conduct. The inference so far is that man instinctively recognises the truth of this teaching: in other words, that the doctrine of God being the Author and Nourisher and Guide of human life is profoundly consonant to man's inmost convictions.

This inference may be tested by comparison between Christ's life and His teaching. That is to say, if there is one thing which has evoked as much admiration from thoughtful men as Christ's teaching it is the life that He led; and so we are moved to ask the question whether there is observable in His life the same prominence of the idea of God's Fatherhood as is given in His teaching. And the answer must be in the affirmative.¹ It is indeed a commonplace that the life

¹ Among other passages cf. Luke ii. 49; Matt. iv. 4; Luke vi. 12; ix. 35; xi. 21; Matt. xxvi. 53; John ii. 16; v. 17; vii. 16; viii. 38; ix. 4; x. 15, 32; xi. 41; xii. 27, 28; xx. 21; Luke xxiii. 46.

He lived was the teaching illustrated in conduct, and that the character was a supreme and perfect embodiment of the principles of the teaching. Else the Founder of the Christian Religion would have been exposed to a certain suspicion of being a teacher who did not practise, the least hint of which would have been fatal to the influence either of the precepts or the example.

In the light then of this fact that the main principle both of Christ's teaching and His action was that of the Fatherhood of God, we may realise not only the poverty but the falseness of the prevailing popular conception of Christianity. In a thousand ways this conception is enunciated to the effect that to be a Christian is to imitate the conduct of Christ: that Christ's revelation to mankind was a revelation of conduct: of a supremely beautiful example which only needs to be set before unenlightened minds to become at once an inspiration and a hope, especially if it be supported by virtuous behaviour on the part of those who teach it. This is the central affirmation of modern popular Christianity, but to it are added certain denials supposed to be corollaries from it. It is constantly said that to teach children anything more than this imitation of Christ's example is to teach them useless and unprovable "dogma"; or else a belief in some deeper principle of religion is dubbed as mysticism, unsuited to the "plain man" of to-day. And in conduct we find as a fact that this view of Christianity very often involves the discontinuance of prayer, "conduct" being taken more and more to mean morality in relation to our fellow-men. Or if men retain at all the habit of prayer, it is merely as a survival of the days of childhood, not to be thought of as rational, but as a kind of desirable accessory to the real business of life, useful for some

kinds of temperament. Hence in the general adoption of the definition that religion is morality tinged with emotion, it has not only come to be felt that it matters little what the emotion is about, but even less whether it is there at all, so long as the morality is preserved; in other words, that if life is lived without prayer no great loss results.

Now among many remarks that might be made on this position, the most obvious is that to imitate Christ is to imitate One who first and foremost was religious; that is, whose life was essentially and perpetually a life of prayer, and that it is not worthy of rational followers of our Master to reckon this prayerfulness merely as a separable adjunct to a life of lofty morality. But we may go further, and say that just as in His teaching when Christ touches on questions of ordinary conduct He becomes paradoxical and impossible to obey literally, so in His conduct He is impossible to imitate, not only because the records of His career are fragmentary, but because His actions are not such as can be included in any possible ethical code. They refuse to be classified into categories or described according to any system, and seem almost designed to warn us against imitation *except in the one particular that He spent time in prayer to His Heavenly Father.* If we consider the narrative of His life on earth and make a clear picture of it as a whole, a very important part of it is prayer; often-repeated, strenuous, self-sacrificing prayer. The rest consists of records of teaching, miracles, and such a display of virtues in the endurance of opposition as is universally felt to be supreme and unapproachable in excellence. Rough though such a classification is, it enables us to see that of all Christ's activities the only one adapted for imitation is prayer. Imitation of the others is open to the censure ex-

pressed by Kant as follows : "In moral action, imitation has no place."¹

Why then is the imitating of His prayerfulness not open to the same censure ? Because praying is properly not so much an activity as a receiving of divine life and strength : not an expenditure but a gathering : not a way of influencing others' lives, but a process whereby one's own life is fed. And all other activities (as is clearly shown in the story of Christ's life) are the outcome of this process, so that to dream of imitating them without beginning with prayer is sheer folly. Christ's words and actions were what they were because His praying was so uninterrupted and so strenuous and faithful ; and thus they give the impression of being prompted by some power far above all that is merely human and earthly, and yet we feel they are in a real sense part of Himself. There is a striking saying of the poet Blake, to the effect that Christ's actions were all impulse ; that is to say, they were always unexpected and the effect of an infinite inspiration, and we feel that something equally "rich and strange" would have continued to be manifested had the life on earth been prolonged. But in proportion as His conduct could be so characterised by a man of genius, the less adapted it was to be an example of behaviour to ordinary men of weak wills and temperaments dulled by custom.

But even such men can imitate the prayerfulness of Christ. And not only is it to be imitated, but it may be taken as explaining to some extent the utter mystery of such a character appearing in the history of mankind. In short, the more we consider the career of Christ, the more inevitably necessary to it does the intercourse with God become. With it, the character, though

¹ "The Critical Philosophy of Kant," E. Caird, vol. ii. p. 278.

adorable in its spotless excellence, becomes to some extent intelligible. Without it we have no clue, no sort of explanation of how Christ was what He was. When we contemplate the story as a whole we feel that communion with God was to Him just as inevitable a part of His experience as suffering. He was a Man of prayer no less than a Man of sorrows. And when He said to the two disciples : "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things ?" (Luke xxiv. 26), the words might as truly have been : "Ought not Christ to have prayed thus ?" It is plain to us that the first Jewish converts were to be blamed, because they found the sufferings of Christ a staggering fact, difficult to harmonise with their new belief in Him. It is worth considering whether we do not fall into a similar but far less excusable error when we fancy that the other great ingredient of His life can be safely excluded by any one who wishes to follow His example. In theory, and to some extent in practice, Englishmen admit the suffering, but are prone to banish tacitly the element of prayer ; and yet all the time a life of virtuous endeavour, from which this element of constant personal communion with God is excluded, may be anything else, but cannot be an *Imitatio Christi*. It is not a following of His example, but a scorning of it.

It may of course be said that to insist on such a consideration as this is merely to add one more to the "unhappy divisions" by which good people are sundered from each other : since it suggests that the broad title Christian can hardly be borne equally by those who follow Christ's example in respect of His intercourse with God, and by those whose imitation of Him is confined to matters of conduct. Among these latter are men of splendid integrity, zeal, and simple-mindedness : and the tendency of our time to broaden the meaning of the word

Christian surely is wholesome, and its opposite mere sectarianism.

Nevertheless if the distinction be true, harm will result from ignoring it. To imitate Christ is to speak the truth at the risk of division. Much of the Sermon on the Mount is a warning against a misuse of the moral instinct: and the chief lesson taught us by Christ's example is not that we can subsist on that instinct alone, but that our hope lies in discerning the purpose for which that instinct has been given us: viz. to lift us through failures from a life of wilful activity to a life of receiving as children from God what we most deeply need.

APPENDIX

THE MEANING OF "HYPOCRITE"

No one who professes to be in any sense a follower of Jesus Christ, or even an admirer of His teaching, can absolve himself from the duty of trying to understand this word. The tremendously severe tone in which Christ habitually spoke of hypocrites, the startling and novel sense which He gave to the word, and which will affect its use for all time, these are sufficient reasons by themselves. But more important is the great probability that the kind of character denoted by the word is far from being an isolated phenomenon, noticed in Palestine 1900 years ago, but is rather a very common form of human infirmity ; common because it is exceedingly insidious and difficult to detect, but deadly beyond all others. One text is enough to show the light in which Christ regarded hypocrites, Matt. xxiv. 51 : "He shall cut him asunder, and appoint his portion with the hypocrites." Those words are spoken of the servant who, at the last day, shall be found by "his lord" grossly misusing his position of trust ; and clearly the hypocrites are here spoken of as the typical outcasts from the Kingdom. Their "portion" is spoken of as the portion of those who are more utterly condemned than any. How, then, if hypocrisy be a common failing of us all ?

The word, as ordinarily used now, denotes a person

who pretends to be something which he is not for the sake of gaining his own ends. Dr. Murray's definition is as follows:—"One who falsely professes to be virtuously or religiously inclined: one who pretends to have feelings or beliefs of a higher order than his real ones; hence, generally, a dissembler, pretender." It will be found that the word will bear this meaning, not inappropriately, in the majority of the passages in which it occurs, but that in others a very different signification belongs to it, which it is far from easy to connect with the first. It will be remembered that the searching and most powerful analysis of hypocrisy contained in the second of Mozley's University Sermons deals with the Scriptural presentation of the hypocrite in the majority of the passages about to be cited, but passes over the sense of the remaining passages, or rather does not explicitly give the clue of their connexion with the more numerous uses of the word.

The substantive *ὑπόκρισις* is used six times in the New Testament: Matt. xxiii. 28; Mark xii. 15; Luke xii. 1; Gal. ii. 13; 1 Tim. iv. 2; 1 Peter ii. 1. In the first five of these passages the ordinary interpretation satisfies the context—pretence, dissembling, want of sincerity; meanings drawn directly from the idea of *ὑποκρίνεσθαι*, to act a part. 1 Peter ii. 1 is quite uncertain. The only time the simple verb is used it means to pretend (Luke xx. 20). The noun *ὑποκριτής* is used thirteen times in Matthew (omitting with R.V. xvi. 3 and xxiii. 14), and in the following passages the ordinary interpretation is apparently adequate, though, of course, a deeper and wider meaning *may* be implied: vi. 2, 6, 16; xxii. 18; xxiii. 25, 27; xxiv. 51 (in this last there is no description given). In Mark the word is used only once (par. to Matt. xv. 7), the meaning of "dissemblers" being included, but certainly not to the

exclusion of a deeper sense, vii. 6. In St. Luke thrice (omitting xi. 44, and including parallels). The only new passages are xii. 56 and xiii. 15, in both of which the ordinary interpretation is abandoned. Therefore, in the Gospels, excepting Matthew, there are only three passages where the word occurs.

Now in the following verses there would seem to be no meaning of pretence or wilful deception of others : Matthew vii. 5; xxiii. 13, 15, 23, 29; Luke xiii. 15. The word denotes a person with an utterly wrong-headed view of moral questions, both in their relation to God and to his fellow-men, shown in a preposterous estimate of certain conventional actions over love and duty. Take the first of these : "Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." We have to ask : What is the *prominent* quality of the man whose conduct is thus described ? Surely the answer is : Blindness about himself. It is tempting to add that it is combined with a certain keenness of vision towards others ; but that is not warranted, since in the parable it is natural to suppose that he who was suffering from the mote drew attention to it, complaining of the pain. A mote in the eye is not first perceived by some quick-sighted friend of the sufferer, but by the sufferer himself. But the friend is described as behaving in a fashion showing almost incredible ignorance about himself ; and that is again, in this case, ignorance about the principal determining fact with regard to the matter in hand. In other words, we find a person offering to do an operation which, of all others, requires delicacy and precision of sight. But our Lord, in describing this person, lays on the colours till the picture is vivid almost to the verge of the grotesque, in order to emphasise this leading fact about him, viz. his inca-

pacity to see clearly. It is a sound principle, in interpreting the parabolic utterances of One who showed an unexampled mastery over natural similitudes, that whenever a comparison violates the probabilities of ordinary life to a decisive and startling degree, it must be because the Speaker desired to bring out with the utmost clearness the spiritual truth which is conveyed by the figure employed. Now nowhere in the whole range of our Lord's parables is there any figure so utterly improbable as that of this person going about with a beam in his eye. This, however, is not an artistic blemish in the picture ; it is a merit, because it makes it difficult for us not to infer that a man in such a plight, and ignorant that he is in such a plight, is drawn for us as a type of those who are deceived about their own moral condition. This man, in making the offer, says plainly that he considers himself to possess a sharp and discriminating vision. The picture shows that this idea is almost inconceivably contrary to the facts.

The next passage to be considered is Matt. xxiii. 13 : "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! because ye shut the kingdom of heaven against men : for ye enter not in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering in to enter." This saying is difficult to handle as explanatory of the word hypocrite, because of its allusive character. We are not told here in what way specially the Pharisees, refusing to enter the kingdom, barred others from it ; we only note at starting that there is no connexion, apparently, with the idea of dissimulation. But it plainly has to do with moral blindness, in that whatever be the facts referred to in the saying, it is obvious that the intention of the words is to open the eyes of these unhappy men to the desperate plight in which they were. They, the religious leaders of the Jews,

were like men standing outside the portals of the Great King's palace, but imagining themselves to be inside, and barring out those who were actually and with longing desire entering in, and all the time imagining that they were helping them in. There is no need to speculate yet as to the exact behaviour which brought about such an appalling result. Christ would never have spoken such words to men who knew or even faintly guessed the truth; indeed, it is hardly conceivable that men held to be religious could *knowingly* place themselves outside the kingdom of bliss, of godliness, and true virtue. So the words imply again that the leading characteristic of these Pharisees was ignorance as to their real position in relation to the greatest things of life.

Matt. xxiii. 15: "Ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a child of hell than yourselves." The picture is of sustained effort and its result. If people make prolonged effort for an admirable object we admire them; but when the object is known to be bad we are indignant; and if the object is very bad and the effort very laborious, the conduct becomes diabolical. But if the result is thought of as good and is in reality bad, we make allowances for them as the victims of a grievous delusion—grievous in proportion to the greatness of the effort and the evil of the result. That is the light in which the Pharisees are regarded here, where they are stigmatised as hypocrites. The matter alluded to is one of the greatest in human life—the effect of man's *principal* endeavours, energies, undertakings on the welfare of his fellow-men. We know from other sources that the Pharisees thought that these endeavours resulted in good. Christ exposes the truth; they really resulted in uttermost evil. Hence the remarkable thing

about such men was not that they were wicked, but that they were blind.

It is significant that in the very next verse, as if the inner meaning of hypocrite were now manifest, Christ breaks out into the changed form of title, "Ye blind guides"; and in ver. 17, "Ye fools and blind."

Matt. xxiii. 23. It is here quite obvious that the description has no reference to the idea of imposing on others by clever acting, but to that of an unconscious disproportion in the estimate of things worth doing which has been often emphasised in different figures. And Christ again points the moral by the adjective *blind*, adding the tragic fact that these victims of a terrible hallucination were guides of others. We cannot be wrong in speaking of this vicious way of life as unconscious, simply because no one would act so madly if he knew what he was doing.

Matt. xxiii. 29. "Ye build the sepulchres of the prophets," &c. Again a most unsparing indictment of the Pharisaic conduct just in the respect where it was thought by themselves and others to be most admirable, not only in itself, but by contrast; and by contrast not with ignorant Gentiles, but with their own Jewish forefathers. "They slew them; we honour their memory, sparing no effort to do it worthily." To any keen-sighted, true-hearted man such a proceeding would have suggested sad reflections; but to make the position perfectly plain our Lord quotes the words of the Pharisees themselves which probably He had heard uttered: "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we should not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets." That is to say, "We recognise that that violence towards such good men was quite wrong. Our forefathers sinned; and, though they may have had provocation, and there was much in the circum-

stances of their lives to deceive them, yet we feel sure that had we lived then we should have had too much discernment to act in the same way." Now this kind of talk exposes vividly the disease of mind under which the speakers were labouring; they attributed to themselves a specially keen moral sense in regard to the treatment of God's messengers, just at a time when they were plotting the death of the greatest of those messengers. This conduct may be variously described; but its main characteristic is that it shows utter moral blindness with regard to self. The Pharisees persuaded themselves that they were prophetic persons, *i.e.* such as would naturally understand and appreciate a prophet if he appeared. And with this feeling they set themselves to play the part which was congruous to it; they took much trouble to build the prophets' tombs. So far Christ describes the outward presentation of the character. But underneath this was the malignant and hopeless misunderstanding of the greatest of all prophets which was even then urging on the Pharisees to His murder. This underlying fact is not placed in bold contrast to the other, as is generally the case; but it is hinted at in the form of an imperative, "Fill ye up, then, the measure of your fathers." Now had the Pharisees been asked if they hated Christ or not, probably some of them would have answered in the affirmative. Their hypocrisy did not consist simply in ignorance of the underlying corruption, but in the relation of it to the outward activity on which they prided themselves and were belauded by others; and this relation, briefly speaking, is that the outward conduct served to divert attention from the inward disease, and made it easy for the individual to remain blind as to his own condition. And more than this, the outward conduct testifies to the true principle according to

which the man's whole self is supposed to be living ; while, in fact, it is only in matters entirely insignificant that the principle is obeyed, and then only by a kind of false external self. The real self is a prey to unsuspected corruption, that is, to all kinds of evil influences dragging it in a direction clean contrary to that which was professed to be right and true. No more appalling instance of a deep disharmony in man's nature could be given than that of these unhappy men filled with a burning hatred of all that was genuine and great in the prophetical witness, and yet painfully trying to prove to themselves and their contemporaries that they honoured and understood them. With their contemporaries their success was apparently considerable ; and this is the pitiful fact in their condition—the very thoroughness with which they pursued the good object falsely, served to blind them to the facts of their real selves.

“Wherefore ye witness to yourselves that ye are sons of them that slew the prophets.” This saying may be explained in more than one way. It may be simply the ironical verdict on their actions in building the tombs ; “the fathers murdered and the sons carry out the burial ; this is quite fitting.” In this case the *were* will mean “and so,” *i.e.* “this being your state of mind ye show by your actions that ye are sons. . . .” But a more satisfactory interpretation would be “and so, *i.e.* by *speaking* thus, ye show that ye are sons. . . .” In other words, by claiming for themselves a certain superiority to their forefathers, the Jews showed that they inherited the same spirit of blind hostility to goodness. That is to say, the men who were always pluming themselves on virtues they did not possess, would in any age burn with hatred towards a real prophet ; and though manners may soften and change, the issue of hatred sooner or

later will be murder. The hypocrite's grand characteristic was an unruffled self-satisfaction, though "rank corruption" was "mining all within." Very thin though the external shell was, it completely concealed from him the awful condition of his real self. But the very essence of a Jewish prophet's task was to pierce the husk of conventional conduct and expose the falseness, hollowness, and cruelty of the heart. There, then, we have the preliminary conditions for a tragedy. Given two men, A who could speak of himself according to the words of v. 30, B unable to keep silence in presence of iniquity, and the murder of B by A merely depends on the outward opportunity. Christ meant, "In so speaking ye reveal the spirit of those who are too self-complacent to brook reproof. That is the spirit which, when a prophet confronts it, will be satisfied with nothing short of his murder. It always has been so. The same law will be exemplified in your case, since ye show the same temper as your fathers."

Hence this most scathing description adds to our conception of the hypocrite. Not only is he ignorant of his own condition, but if his ignorance is disturbed, he is stirred to a frenzy of wrath. Leave him in his disease of blindness and you may live at peace with him ; but try to heal him and he will kill you.

Luke xiii. 15. "Ye hypocrites, doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to a watering ? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound, lo ! these eighteen years, to have been loosed from this bond on the day of the Sabbath ?"

What was wrong with men whose conduct is here denounced ? They had lost all sense of proportion in morals, all ability to see straight and come to a

sensible decision, if their own interests were in any way concerned. It is tempting to explain the use of "hypocrite" here as if the ruler of the Synagogue and those whom he represented were pretending a zeal for the law, but in reality were actuated solely by jealousy of Christ ; and in support of this it is pointed out that the rebuke addressed to the people was unwarranted.¹ There is no evidence that the law was being broken. But, first, this is impossible to prove. Among the swarm of rabbinical regulations on this subject it is probable there was one which Christ was, perhaps purposely, violating ; at any rate, the official may have thought so. Secondly, our Lord leaves this question on one side, and we are concerned not with the *general* dissimulation or trickery of the man, but with that aspect of it which is here denounced and which is directly stigmatised as hypocrisy ; and here we find no dissimulation, but rather a shocking perverseness and stupidity which was not only inconsistent but downright cruel. If we fix our attention on the contrasted actions spoken of by Christ our verdict must be that the conduct reveals a hopelessly distorted view of life and duty, a contradiction of admitted principles which, as elsewhere, involved a violation of the law of love. Thirdly, the use of the plural *hypocrites* in v. 15 debars us from attaching to the word any such meaning as is drawn exclusively from the conduct of this particular official. Something, doubtless, in that conduct reminded Christ that the man was exhibiting the spirit of the "actor," that he was one of the class ; but in order to determine what it was which gave this reminder we must be guided entirely by Christ's denunciation, which is the denunciation of a *class*, and is restricted in its scope to a particular kind

¹ *Vide* Plummer *in loc.* Cyril *et al.* in *Catena Aurea*.

of depraved moral estimate, terribly mischievous indeed, but free from any thought of deceiving others ; and the words exclude all question as to a violation of the law of the Sabbath.

But it is time to remark that in this passage and in several others an important clue to the interpretation of the hypocrite is offered. *Two sets of actions are mentioned by way of contrast neither of which, taken singly, would be called hypocrisy, though one of them is found to be bad in itself*—the hindering of the healing of the woman. So in Luke xii. 56 what makes the Scribes and Pharisees deserve the name of hypocrite is not that they interpreted accurately the signs of the weather, which is quite innocent conduct, nor that they failed to read the meaning of contemporary history, though that is a most serious defect, but that the defect was combined with the activity and in a way covered by it (cf. Luke xii. 2) so as to make the chance of detection smaller. This is a point to be noticed in several of the pictures of the hypocrite which Christ has drawn for us. “Ye tithe mint, &c. . . . and have left undone. . . .” And in v. 25 of the same chapter the cleansing of the outside of the cup and platter, innocent in itself, if it is truly to denote hypocrisy must be a concomitant of the great defect that the men were full of corruption within, which again *by itself* might have been described as depravity or villainy, but not as hypocrisy.

Now it is not unfrequently taken for granted that the hypocrites gave their energies to these outward things merely because they liked the praise of men which accompanied them. It is not difficult, however, to exaggerate the extent to which this motive enters into the meaning of the word hypocrisy. Just as “prentce” is a common but not necessary ingredient in hypocrisy, so the deliberately acting in order to be

praised will be noticed in some of the Gospel instances, but not in all. If it were the central secret of hypocrisy, then the quality could be exposed and denounced by one set of actions being chosen, without any contrast being drawn, as it nearly always is, by Christ. But if we try to do this we pass outside all the associations of the word. Suppose a frankly ambitious man who makes no concealment of his aiming at a big reputation, and only does not habitually proclaim it because it would be bad manners to do so; no one would call him a hypocrite. Yet he would be concerned perpetually with the effect of his actions on men's estimate, though he possibly might be clever enough to perceive that to win a name it is often advisable to flout convention to a certain extent. The character would, it is true, be the reverse of admirable; we should reckon it as coarse and mundane the more clearly its true bias were discerned, and, as has often been remarked, if the quest for fame fails it wins contempt. But suppose it does not fail; suppose a strong able man whose efforts, thoroughly understood by everybody, to make himself a name have taken the form of eminent and undeniable public services, men withhold their scorn and, somewhat reluctantly, give their tribute of admiration. It is felt that there is a vast defect in his whole scheme of life and conduct, but it is not hypocrisy, because it is free from deep inconsistency, *i.e.* the profession of one set of principles while acting so as to reveal belief in another. It will be found that this is never the case with the Gospel instances of hypocrisy.

Again, however, it is easy to form an erroneous idea of the dishonesty of the hypocrite's life. Even if we take a prominent instance, such as the picture drawn in Mark xii. 40, "they which devour widows'

houses and for a pretence (*προφάσει*) make long prayers," we are not to infer that the prayers were necessarily sham. The Pharisee may have intently fixed his thoughts and done his best to pray sincerely, and so far his effort may have been honest and diligent, just as in the cleaning of the outside of the cup and platter. But the hypocrisy of the conduct lies in the relation of this action to the contrasted fact, the habitual injustice shown towards the weak, the deep inconsistency of life being completely concealed from the man himself. In short, *προφάσει*, means the speaking or acting (properly the former) so that something else which is going on may be covered up and attention distracted from its true meaning. And a connexion between this and the desire for men's praise is easily established. If the outward and innocent set of actions provoked admiration from contemporaries, then their particular selection would be facilitated, and the requisite stimulus provided for their continuance, which not unfrequently must have cost a great deal of trouble and self-denial (Matt. xxiii. 13, 23, 29; Mark xii. 40; Luke xviii. 12). Their primary object, though this was often quite unconsciously pursued, was to enable the unhappy man to abide in ignorance of the guiltiness and immorality of a large department of his life.

We are now in a position to bring into one focus the apparently divergent indications afforded by the vivid pictures of Matt. vi. 2 (praying in public), 6, 16; vii. 5 (the mote and the beam); xxii. 18 (the tribute money); Luke xii. 56 (signs of the weather and signs of the times); xiii. 15 (the healing of the woman in the synagogue). In each case the true condition of the hypocrite is pourtrayed as deeply corrupt in some vital and central department of human life

and conduct; and apparently the hypocrite is totally ignorant of this fact. His ignorance must be due, first, to a native disinclination to examine himself and his motives; secondly, to the readiness with which he gives himself to some external activity which disguises the true state of the case not primarily from others so much as from himself; this readiness being in some cases quickened by the approval of his contemporaries. Sometimes the word is used to express this kind of concealment of the truth by some outward conduct when the trickery is conscious (Matt. xxii. 18). But ordinarily it is implied that the hypocrite has contrived so to fix his attention on a portion of his life and practice, which for some reason or other it pleases him to contemplate, that in relation to the deeper facts of his own character he has become totally blind.

Having thus determined the central conception of the word, we may notice how far the texts mentioned above as apparently illustrating the ordinary modern meaning of dissembler or deceiver of others, conflict with the notion yielded by the verses just examined. Evidently, we have in Matt. vi. 2, 6, 16, an identical use of the word—the coarse advertisement of the outward activity, the context not requiring here the contrast of the inward disease. The advertisement, though not an essential of hypocrisy, is a likely concomitant of the activity presented to man's view. For if it is successful, as it generally is for a time, in attracting applause, it assists the effort necessary to continue the external activity, which otherwise might soon pall, and the reward once secured prevents the hypocrite from asking himself if the trouble is worth while. But supposing an individual so absorbed in some outward activity as to be blinded to his inward violation of moral principle, and even if there be no striving

after applause, there is hypocrisy in the Gospel sense ; the man's view of life is upside down, but he does not know it. Those who trumpet their own performances make their delusion more hopeless by adding to it an element of moral intoxication ; but sometimes the delusion is complete though the temperament be sober. The Pharisee in the parable (Luke xviii. 11) is a quiet man enough, nor does he puff himself to gain men's praise ; what is distinctive about him is the success with which his insignificant outward activities have concealed from him the true horror of his unloving heart. Thus in these three texts the vulgar ostentation is an adventitious detail, very common, but not essential to hypocrisy. We notice, too, that Christ when giving these three pictures has no occasion to expose the secret inconsistency of the character, and so only *one* side of the hypocrite's life is brought into view ; there is no contrast. And, as before, we find that there is no designed deception of others or dissembling hinted at.

Matt. xxii. 18. The Tribute-Money. This is an extremely simple instance of dissimulation. Again there is the contrast between the inward and the outward ; the outward action which was intended to have a certain appearance, and the inward design which was quite different from what was implied. Here and here only the deception of others is certainly intentional. Matt. xxiii. 25 and 27, though ordinarily taken as mere pictures of deliberate deceit, are plainly consistent with the fundamental meaning of the word here given. In short, they may be regarded as the clearest statement of the essence of the hypocritical character, that element which is always present ; the innocent or praiseworthy outward activity which serves to conceal the inward disease, so that the sufferer is indeed blind, v. 26.

There is thus no conflict of meaning between these texts and those first considered. In them all the idea of a contrast between the inward and the outward is either expressed or vividly implied ; while the two ideas of aiming at men's praise and of consciously taking in people are sometimes expressed as if they were essential, but ordinarily not. We find that as regards the noun *ὑπόκρισις* the context usually affords no clue (Matt. xxiii. 28 ; Mark xii. 15). But Luke xii. 1 is an exception. Directly after the warning against "the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy," Christ gives as His reason for the saying, the principle that "there is nothing *covered* that shall not be revealed," implying distinctly that the essence of hypocrisy is a covering up of something ; and, further, that the covering shall ultimately prove a failure. The English word as ordinarily used conveys more sense of deliberate and successful deception of others. The Gospel idea of hypocrite is more that of a victim of his own desperate blindness as to the meaning of a principle, and emphasises less the associations of knavery than those of stupidity. The substantive appears in St. Paul's narrative to the Galatians of the inconsistency of Peter and Barnabas in the well-known episode at Antioch, where the word is translated by the Revisers "dissimulation" ; and hence it approaches in meaning to that of hypocrite in the story of the Tribute-Money, Matt. xxii. 18 ; though it is far from clear that St. Peter's conduct showed a wilful desire to deceive the Judaisers. It was probably the result of moral timidity, which frequently blurs the vision, as to the bearing of a principle. Nothing very definite can be inferred from the remaining uses, 1 Tim. iv. 2, 1 Peter ii. 1.

A very interesting and difficult question remains :

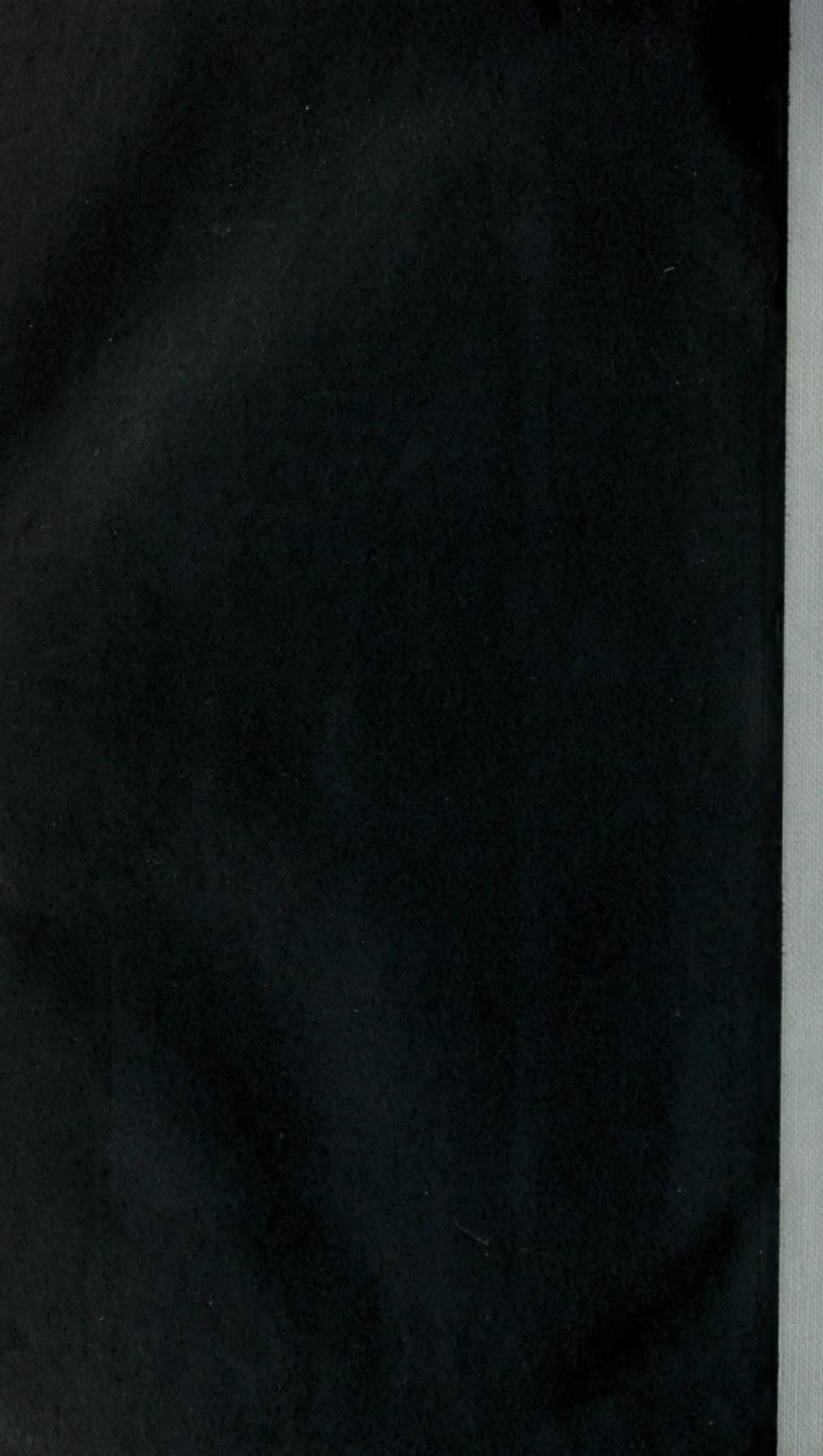
What is the connexion between this state of character and the word "actor," ὑποκριτής? First, it may be doubted whether the Aramaic original used by our Lord covered the same associations as ὑποκριτής; but it could hardly be doubted that the idea of acting a part must have been conveyed. We may conjecture that Christ made it an object to burn the lesson deep into His hearers' minds, and that for this purpose a word was chosen more for its startling novelty than for its psychological accuracy; and therefore it would probably be needless to probe very deeply into the question. There is, however, a profound connexion between the idea of acting and that of *insincerity* in the sense of the opposite of the single-heartedness on which the sixth Beatitude was pronounced; and it is easy to see that insincerity in the broadest sense of the word was the keynote of the hypocrite's character. He was dishonest with himself, first of all, because he never looked squarely into his own mind and conscience and motives. He was untrue to himself in that his real self was not the moving influence in his ordinary daily life; simply because that self, though he knew it not, was not presentable to mankind, and so he eagerly wove, as it were, a texture of external behaviour on which he fixed his own attention, and generally succeeded in fixing the attention of others. Used in a popular sense the word "acting" gives a fair picture of this state of things. The actor and the hypocrite, in the Scriptural sense, both present to onlookers a person which is not really their own. Each does his best to be some one else.

Thus interpreted, the hypocritical or Pharisaic character is seen to be not local or confined to one century of human history, but common in every age and country. The earliest and deepest symptoms of

it are, first, a sensitiveness to being found fault with ; this generally denoting that the weak spot which is touched with some want of tenderness, perhaps, by a neighbour, has not previously been examined by the man himself. But if he has been severe to his own sins, the severity of others is a light matter, and is often found to ignore the worst faults and fasten on secondary and less vital offences. St. Paul's precept : "Work out your own salvation *with fear and trembling*," is a prescription against incipient Pharisaism. Again, wherever there is what we call hollowness of character, the leaven of hypocrisy is at work ; for the essential idea of hollowness is not only an empty inside (or worse than empty), but a comparatively solid or wholesome exterior, just the double fact which we find Christ exposes repeatedly. The description of the Scribes and Pharisees at the beginning of Matt. xxiii., though the word "hypocrite" is absent from the paragraph, clearly refers to the same type of character ; not the obviously bad, but the *disappointing*. There are scores and scores of characters which quite instinctively present an appearance in outward conduct on which others can look without dissatisfaction, anyhow, for a time ; but the tragedies of human life are largely concerned with the moments in such a life when some crisis reveals a pitiable and far-reaching weakness or corruption, so that just when men wish to find support in him the hypocrite gives way. Hence there is no reason for surprise at the strong distaste for praise which is the normal characteristic of the best men. It is not that they take the cynic's view that the praise is wholly undeserved and only given in ignorance of the facts, nor the conceited view, that they are above the need of it. The reason is that they instinctively know their lives to be roughly divided into outward and inward ; and that

men's praise, being concerned only with the outward, if allowed, may draw our affections by a powerful spell towards what is outward, illusory, and passing away, so that the inward life of the soul, the realities of our personal existence which abide for ever, are overlooked. For, strangely enough, though human valuation of the outer life that meets the eye is known to be futile, as soon as we try to appraise the real inner life our words of commendation are felt to be profane. How, then, should a sincere child of God feel any deep delight in the glory of men's estimate ? It is not difficult to see that the welcoming of such glory becomes a feeling antagonistic to personal trust in Christ (John v. 44).

THE END



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